

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE WATCH.

MR. SERGEANT STILLINGFAR sat at dinner in his house in Russell Square one Sunday afternoon. A great cause, in which he was to lead, had brought him up from circuit, to which he would return when the *Nisi Prius* trial was over. The cloth was being removed when I entered. He received me with his usual kindly welcome.

"Why not have come to dinner, Charles? Just had it, you say? All the more reason why we might have had it together. Sit down, and help yourself to wine."

Declining the wine, I drew my chair near his and told him what I had come about.

A few days had gone on since the last chapter. What with the trouble connected with Mrs. Brightman, and the trouble connected with Tom Heriot, I had enough on my mind at that time, if not upon my shoulders. As regarded Mrs. Brightman, no one could help me; but regarding the other —

Was Tom in London, or was he not? How was I to find out? I had again gone prowling about the book-stall and its environs, and had seen no trace of him. Had Leah really seen him, or only some other man who resembled him?

Again I questioned Leah. Her opinion was not to be shaken. She held emphatically to her assertion. It was Tom that she had seen and none other.

"You may have seen some other sailor, sir; I don't say to the contrary; but the sailor I saw was Captain Heriot," she reiterated. "Suppose I go again to-night, sir? I may perhaps have the good luck to see him."

"Should you call it good luck, Leah?"

"Ah, well, sir, you know what I mean," she answered. "Shall I go to-night?"

"No, Leah; I am going myself. I cannot rest in this uncertainty."

Rest! I felt more like a troubled spirit or a wandering ghost. Arthur Lake asked what it was that ailed me, and where I disappeared to of an evening.

Once more I turned out in the discarded clothes to saunter about Lambeth. It was Saturday night, and the thoroughfares were crowded; but amidst all who came and went, I saw no trace of Tom.

Worried, disheartened, I determined to carry the perplexity to my Uncle Stillingfar. That he was true as steel, full of loving kindness to all the world, no matter what their errors, and that he would aid me with his counsel—if any counsel could avail—I well knew. And thus I found myself at his house on that Sunday afternoon. Of course he had heard about the escape of the convicts; had seen Tom's name in the list; but he did not know that he was suspected of having reached London. I told him of what Leah had seen, and added the little episode about "Miss Betsy."

"And now, what can be done, Uncle Stillingfar? I have come to ask you."

His kindly blue eyes became thoughtful whilst he pondered the question. "Indeed, Charles, I know not," he answered. "Either you must wait in patience until he turns up some fine day—as he is sure to do if he is in London—or you must quietly pursue your search for him, and smuggle him away when you have found him."

"But if I don't find him? Do you think it could be Tom that Leah saw? Is it possible that he can be in London?"

"Quite possible. If a homeward vessel, bound it may be for the port of London, picked them up, what more likely than that he is here? Again, who else would call himself Charles Strange, and pass himself off for you? Though I cannot see his motive for doing it."

"Did you ever know any man so recklessly imprudent, uncle?"

"I have never known any man so reckless as Tom Heriot. You must do your best to find him, Charles."

"I don't know how. I thought you might possibly have suggested some plan. Every passing day increases his danger."

"It does: and the chances of his being recognised."

"It seems useless to search further in Lambeth: he must have changed his quarters. And to look about London for him will be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. I suppose," I slowly added, "it would not do to employ a detective?"

"Not unless you wish to put him into the lion's mouth," said the Sergeant. "Why, Charles, it would be his business to re-take him. Rely upon it, the police are now looking for him if they have the slightest suspicion that he is here."

At that time one or two private detectives had started in business on their own account, having nothing to do with the police: now they have sprung up in numbers. It was to these I alluded.

Sergeant Stillingfar shook his head. "I would not trust one of them, Charles : it would be too dangerous an experiment. No ; what you do, you must do yourself. Once let Government get scent that he is here, and we shall probably find the walls placarded with a reward for his apprehension."

"One thing I am surprised at," I said as I rose to leave : "that if he is here, he should not have let me know it. What can he be doing for money ? An escaped convict is not likely to have much of that about him."

Sergeant Stillingfar shook his head. "There are points about the affair that I cannot fathom, Charles. Talking of money—you are well off now, but if more than you can spare should be needed to get Tom Heriot away, apply to me."

"Thank you, uncle ; but I don't think it will be needed. Where would you recommend him to escape to ?"

"Find him first," was the Sergeant's answer.

He accompanied me himself to the front door. As we stood, speaking a last word, a middle-aged man, with keen eyes and spare frame, dressed as a workman, came up with a brisk step. Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar met the smile on the man's face as he glanced up in passing.

"Arkwright !" he exclaimed. "I hardly knew you. Some sharp case in hand, I conclude ?"

"Just so, Sergeant ; but I hope to bring it to earth before the day's over. You know ——"

But there the man, glancing at me, came to a pause.

"However, I mustn't talk about it now, so good afternoon Sergeant." And thus speaking, he walked briskly onwards.

"I wonder what he has in hand ? I think he would have told me, Charles, but for your being present," cried my uncle, looking after him. "A keen man is Arkwright."

"*Arkwright !*" I echoed, the name now impressing itself upon me.

"Surely not Arkwright the renowned detective !"

"Yes, it is. And he has evidently got himself up as a workman in furtherance of the case he has in hand. He knew you, Charles ; depend upon that ; though you did not know him."

A fear, perhaps a foolish one, fell upon me. "Uncle Stillingfar," I breathed, "can his case be *Tom's* ? Think you it is he who is being run to earth ?"

"No, no. I do not think that likely," he answered, after a moment's consideration. "Anyway, you must use every exertion to find him, for his stay in London is full of danger."

It will be readily believed that this incident had not added to my peace of mind. One more visit I decided to pay to the old ground at Lambeth, and after that—why, in truth, whether to turn east, west, north or south, I knew no more than the dead.

Monday was bright and frosty ; Monday evening clear, cold, and

starlight. The gas-lights flared away in the streets and shops, the roads were lined with wayfarers.

Sauntering down the narrow pavement on the opposite side of the way, in the purposeless manner that a hopeless man favours, I approached the book-stall. A sailor was standing before it, his head bent over the wares. Every pulse within me went up to fever heat: for there was that in him that reminded me of Tom Heriot.

I crossed quietly to the stall, stood side by side with him, and took up a handful of penny dreadfuls. Yes, it was he—Tom Heriot.

"Tom," I cried softly. "Tom!"

I felt the start he gave. But he did not move hand or foot; only his eyes turned to scan me.

"Tom," I whispered again, apparently intent upon a grand picture of a castle in flames, and a gentleman miraculously escaping with a lady from an attic window. "Tom, don't you know me?"

"For goodness' sake don't speak to me, old man!" he breathed in answer, the words barely audible. "Go away, for the love of heaven! I've been a prisoner here for the last three minutes. That policeman yonder would know me, and I dare not turn. His name's Wren."

Three doors off, a policeman was standing at the edge of the pavement, facing the shops, as if waiting to pounce upon someone he was expecting to pass. Even as Tom spoke, he wheeled round to the right, and marched up the street. Tom as quickly disappeared to the left, leaving a few words in my ear.

"I'll wait for you at the other end, Charley; it is darker there than here. Don't follow me immediately."

So I remained where I was, still bending an enraptured gaze upon the burning castle and the gallant knight and damsel escaping from it at their peril.

"Betsy says the account comes to seven shillings, Mr. Strange."

The address gave me nearly as great a thrill as the sight of Tom had done. It came from the man, Lee, now emerging from his shop. Involuntarily I pulled my hat lower upon my brow. He looked up the street and down it.

"Oh, I beg pardon—thought Mr. Strange was standing here," he said. And then I saw the error I had made. It was not to me he spoke, but to Tom Heriot. My gaze was still fascinated by the flaming picture.

"Anything you'd like this evening, sir?"

"I'll take this sheet—half a dozen of them," I said, putting down sixpence.

"Thank you, sir. A fine night."

"Yes, very. Were you speaking to the sailor who stood here?" I added, carelessly. "He went off in that direction, I think," pointing to the opposite one Tom had taken.

"Yes, answered the man; 'twas Mr. Strange. He had asked

me to look how much his score was for tobacco. I daresay he'll be back presently. Captain Strange, by rights," added Lee, chattily.

"Oh! Captain of a vessel?"

"Of his own vessel; a yacht. Not but what he have been about the world in vessels of all sorts, he tells us; one voyage afore the mast, the next right up next to the skipper. But for them ups and downs where, as he says, would sailors find their experience?"

"Very true. Well, this is all I want just now. Good evening."

"Good evening, sir," replied Caleb Lee.

The end of the street, to which Tom had pointed, was destitute of shops; the houses were small and poor; consequently, it was tolerably dark. Tom was sauntering along, smoking a short pipe.

"Is there any place at hand where we can have a few words together in tolerable security?" I asked.

"Come along," briefly responded Tom. "You walk on the other side of the street, old fellow; keep me in view."

It was good advice, and I took it. He increased his pace to a brisk walk, and presently turned down a narrow passage, which brought him to a sort of small, triangular green, planted with shrubs and trees. I followed, and we sat down on one of the benches.

"Are you quite mad, Tom?"

"Not mad a bit," laughed Tom. "I say, Charley, did you come to that book-stall to look after me?"

"Ay. And it's about the tenth time I have been there."

"How the dickens did you find me out?"

"Chance one evening took Leah into the neighbourhood, and she happened to see you. I had feared you might be in England."

"You had heard of the wreck of the *Vengeance*, I suppose; and that a few of us had escaped. Good old Leah! Did I give her a fright?"

We were sitting side by side. Tom had put his pipe out, lest the light should catch the sight of any passing stragglers. We spoke in whispers. It was, perhaps, as safe a place as could be found; nevertheless, I sat upon thorns.

Not so Tom. By the few signs that might be gathered—his light voice, his gay laugh, his careless manner—Tom felt as happy and secure as if he had been attending one of Her Majesty's levées, in the full glory of scarlet coat and flashing sword blade.

"Do you know, Tom, you have half-killed me with terror and apprehension? How could you be so reckless as to come back to London?"

"Because the old ship brought me," lightly returned Tom.

"I suppose a vessel picked you up—and the comrades who escaped with you?"

"It picked two of us up. The other three died."

"What, in the boat?"

He nodded. "In the open boat at sea."

"How did you manage to escape? I thought convicts were too well looked after."

"So they are, under ordinary circumstances; shipwrecks form the exception. I'll give you the history, Charley."

"Make it brief, then. I am upon thorns."

Tom laughed, and began.

"We were started on that blessed voyage, a cargo of men in irons, and for some time made a fair passage, and thought we must be nearing the other side. Such a crew, that cargo, Charles! Such an awful lot! Villainous wretches, who wore their guilt on their faces, and suffered their deserts; half demons, most of them. A few amongst them were no doubt like me, innocent enough; wrongfully accused and condemned——"

"But go on with the narrative now, Tom."

"I swear I was innocent," he cried, with emotion, heedless of my interruption. "I was wickedly careless, I admit that, but the guilt was another's, not mine. When I put those bills into circulation, Charles, I knew no more that they were forged than you did. Don't you believe me?"

"I do believe you. I have believed you throughout."

"And if the trial had not been hurried on I think it could have been proved. It was hurried on, Charles, and when it was on it was hurried over. I am suffering unjustly."

"Yes, Tom. But won't you go on with your story?"

"Where was I? Oh, about the voyage and the shipwreck. After getting out of the south-east trades, we had a fortnight's light winds and calms, and then got into a steady westerly wind, before which we ran quietly for some days. One dark night, it was the fifteenth of November, and thick, drizzling weather, the wind about north-west, we had turned-in and were in our first sleep, when a tremendous uproar arose on deck; the watch shouting and tramping, the officers' orders and the boatswain's mate's shrill piping rising above the din. One might have thought Old Nick had leaped aboard and was giving chase. Next came distinctly that fearful cry, 'All hands save ship!' Sails were being clewed up, yards were being swung round. Before we could realise what it all meant, the ship had run ashore; and there she stuck, bumping as if she would knock her bottom out."

"Get on, Tom," I whispered, for he had paused, and seemed to be spinning a long yarn instead of a short one.

"Fortunately, the ship soon made a sort of cradle for herself in the sand and lay on her starboard bilge. To attempt to get her off was hopeless. So they got us all out of the ship and on shore, and put us under tents made of the sails. The skipper made out, or thought he made out, the island to be that of Tristan d'Acunha: whether it was or not I can't say positively. At first we thought it was uninhabited, but it turned out to have a few natives on it, sixty

or eighty in all. In the course of a few days every movable thing had been landed. All the boats were intact, and were moored in a sort of creek, or small natural harbour, their gear, sails and oars in them."

"Hush!" I warningly breathed, "or you are lost!"

A policeman's bull's-eye was suddenly turned upon the grass. By the man's size, I knew him for Tom's friend, Wren. We sat motionless. The light just escaped us, and the man passed on. But we had been in danger.

"If you would only be quicker, Tom! I don't want to know about boats and their gear."

He laughed. "How impatient you are, Charles! Well, to get on ahead. A cargo of convicts cannot be kept as securely under such circumstances as had befallen us as they could be in a ship's hold, and the surveillance exercised was surprisingly lax. Two or three of the prisoners were meditating an escape, and thought they saw their way to effecting it by means of one of the boats. I found this out, and joined the party. But there were almost insurmountable difficulties in the way. It was absolutely necessary that we should put on ordinary clothes—for what vessel, picking us up, but would have delivered us up at the first port it touched at had we been in convict dress? We marked the purser's slop-chest, which was under a tent and well-filled, and——"

"Do get on, Tom!"

"Here goes, then! One calm, but dark night, when other people were sleeping, we stole down to the creek, five of us, rigged ourselves out in the pursur's toggery, leaving the Government uniforms in exchange, unmoored one of the cutters, and got quietly away. We had secreted some bread and salt meat; water there had been already on board. The wind was off the land, and we let the boat drift before it a bit before attempting to make sail. By daylight we were far enough from the island; no chance of their seeing us—a speck on the waters. The wind, hitherto south, had backed to the westward. We shaped a course by the sun to the eastward, and sailed along at the rate of five or six knots. My comrades were not as rough as they might have been, Charley; rather decent fellows for convicts. Two of them were from Essex; had been sentenced for poaching only. Now began our look-out: constantly straining our eyes along the horizon for a sail, but especially astern for an outward-bounder, but only saw one or two in the distance that did not see us. What I underwent in that boat as day after day passed and no sail appeared, I won't enter upon now, old fellow. The provisions were exhausted, and so was the water. One by one three of my companions went crazy and died. The survivor and I had consigned the last of them to the deep on the twelfth day, and then I thought my turn had come; but Markham was worse than I was. How many hours went on, I knew not. I lay at the bottom of the boat,

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exhausted and half unconscious, when suddenly I heard voices. I imagined it to be a dream. But in a few minutes a boat was alongside the cutter, and two of its crew had stepped over and were raising me up. They spoke to me, but I was too weak to understand or answer; in fact, I was delirious. I and Markham were taken on board and put to bed. After some days, passed in a sort of dreamy, happy delirium, well cared for and attended to, I woke up to the realities of life. Markham was dead: he had never revived, and died of exposure and weakness some hours after the rescue."

"What vessel had picked you up?"

"It was the *Discovery*, a whaler belonging to Whitby, and homeward bound. The Captain, Van Hoppe, was Dutch by birth, but had been reared in England and had always sailed in English ships. A good and kind fellow, if ever there was one. Of course, I had to make my tale good, and suppress the truth. The passenger-ship in which I was sailing to Australia to seek my fortune had foundered in mid-ocean, and those who escaped with me had died of their sufferings. That was true so far. Captain Van Hoppe took up my misfortunes warmly. Had he been my own brother—had he been *you*, Charley—he could not have treated me better or cared for me more. The bark had a prosperous run home. She was bound for the port of London; and when I put my hand into Van Hoppe's at parting, and tried to thank him for his goodness, he left a twenty-pound note in it. 'You'll need it, Mr. Strange,' he said; 'you can repay me when your fortune's made and you are rich.'"

"*Strange!*" I cried.

Tom laughed.

"I called myself 'Strange' on the whaler. Don't know that it was wise of me. One day when I was getting better and lay deep in thought—which just then chanced to be of you, Charley—the mate suddenly asked me what my name was. 'Strange,' I answered, on the spur of the moment. That's how it was. And that's the brief history of my escape."

"You have had money, then, for your wants since you landed," I remarked.

"I have had the twenty pounds. It's coming to an end now."

"You ought not to have come to London. You should have got the captain to put you ashore somewhere, and then made your escape from England."

"All very fine to talk, Charley! I had not a sixpence in my pocket, or any idea that he was going to help me. I could only come on as far as the bark would bring me."

"And suppose he had not given you money—what then?"

"Then I must have contrived to let you know that I was home again, and borrowed from you," he lightly replied.

"Well, your being here is frightfully dangerous."

"Not a bit of it. As long as the police don't suspect I am in

England, they won't look after me. It's true that a few of them might know me, but I do not think they would in this guise and with my altered face."

"You were afraid of one to-night."

"Well, *he* is especially one who might know me; and he stood there so long that I began to think he might be watching me. Any way, I've been on shore these three weeks, and nothing has come of it yet."

"What about that young lady named Betsy? Miss Betsy Lee."

Tom threw himself back in a fit of laughter.

"I hear the old fellow went down to Essex Street one night to ascertain whether I lived there! The girl asked me one day where I lived, and I rapped out Essex Street."

"But, Tom, what have you to do with the girl?"

"Nothing; nothing, on my honour. I have often been in the shop, sometimes of an evening. The father has invited me to some grog in the parlour behind it, and I have sat there for an hour chatting with him and the girl. That's all. She is a well-behaved, modest little girl; none better."

"Well, Tom, with one imprudence and another, you stand a fair chance——"

"There, there! Don't preach, Charley. What you call imprudence, I call fun."

"What do you think of doing? To remain on here for ever in this disguise?"

"Couldn't, I expect, if I wanted to. I must soon see about getting away."

"You must get away at once."

"I am not going yet, Charley; take my word for that; and I am as safe in London, I reckon, as I should be elsewhere. Don't say but I may have to clear out of this particular locality. If that burly policeman is going to make a permanent beat of it about here, he might drop upon me some fine evening."

"And you must exchange your sailor's disguise, as you call it, for a better one."

"Perhaps so. That rough old coat you have on, Charley, might not come amiss to me."

"You can have it. Why do you fear that policeman should know you, more than any other?"

"He was present at the trial last August. Was staring me in the ace most of the day. His name's Wren."

I sighed.

"Well, Tom, it is getting late; we have sat here as long as is consistent with safety," I said, rising.

He made me sit down again.

"The later the safer, perhaps, Charley. When shall we meet again?"

"Ay; when, and where?"

"Come to-morrow evening to this same spot. It is as good a one as any I know of. I shall remain indoors all day to-morrow. Of course one does not care to run needlessly into danger. Shall you find your way to it?"

"Yes, and will be here; but I shall go now. Do be cautious Tom. Do you want any money? I have brought some with me."

"Many thanks, old fellow; I've enough to go on with for a day or two. How is Blanche? Did she nearly die of the disgrace?"

"She did not know of it. Does not know it yet."

"No!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, how can it have been kept from her? She does not live in a wood."

"Level has managed it, somehow. She was abroad during the trial, you know. They have chiefly lived there since, Blanche seeing no English newspapers; and of course her acquaintances do not gratuitously speak to her about it. But I don't think it can be kept from her much longer."

"But where does she think I am—all this time?"

"She thinks you are in India with the regiment."

"I suppose *he* was in a fine way over it!"

"Level? Yes—naturally; and is still. He would have saved you, Tom, at any cost."

"As you would, and one or two more good friends; but, you see, I did not know what was coming upon me in time to ask them. It fell upon my head like a thunderbolt. Level is not a bad fellow at bottom."

"He is a downright good one—at least, that's my opinion of him."

We stood, hand locked in hand, at parting. "Where are you staying?" I whispered.

"Not far off. I've a lodging in the neighbourhood—one room."

"Fare you well, then, until to-morrow evening."

"Au revoir, Charley."

CHAPTER XXVI.

TOM HERIOT.

I FOUND my way straight enough the next night to the little green with its trees and shrubs. Tom was there, and was singing to himself one of our boyhood's songs taught us by Leah.

"Young Henry was as brave a youth
As ever graced a martial story;
And Jane was fair as lovely truth:
She sighed for love and he for glory.

"To her his faith he meant to plight,
And told her many a gallant story
But war, their honest joys to blight,
Called him away from love to glory.

Young Henry met the foe with pride;
Jane followed—fought—ah! hapless story!
In man's attire, by Henry's side,
She died for love and he for glory."

He was still dressed as a sailor, but the pilot-coat was buttoned up high and tight about his throat, and the round glazed hat was worn upon the front of his head instead of the back of it.

"I thought you meant to change these things, Tom," I said as we sat down.

"All in good time," he answered. "Don't quite know yet what costume to adopt. Could one become a negro-melody man, think you, Charley—or a Red Indian juggler with balls and sword-swallowing?"

How light he seemed! how supremely indifferent! Was it real or only assumed. Then he turned suddenly upon me:

"I say, what are you in black for, Charley? For my sins?"

"For Mr. Brightman."

"Mr. Brightman!" he repeated, his tone changing to one of concern. "Is he dead?"

"He died the last week in February. Some weeks ago now. Died quite suddenly."

"Well, well, well!" softly breathed Tom Heriot. "I am very sorry. I did not know it. But how am I likely to know anything of what the past months have brought forth?"

It would serve no purpose to relate the interview of that night in detail. We spent it partly in quarrelling. That is, in differences of opinion. It was impossible to convince Tom of his danger. I told him about the Sunday incident, when detective Arkwright passed the door of Sergeant Stillingfar, and my momentary fear that he might be looking after Tom. He only laughed. "Good old Uncle Stillingfar!" cried he; "give my love to him." And all his conversation was carried on in the same light strain.

"But you must leave Lambeth," I urged. "You said you would do so."

"I said I might. I will, if I see just cause for doing so. Plenty of time yet. I am not *sure*, you know, Charles, that Wren would know me."

"The very fact of your having called yourself 'Strange' ought to take you away from here."

"Well, I suppose that was a bit of a mistake," he acknowledged. "But look here, brother mine, your own fears mislead you. Until it is known that I have made my way home no one will be likely to look after me. Believing me to be at the Antipodes, they won't search London for me."

"They may suspect that you are in London, if they don't actually know it."

"Not they. To begin with, it must be a matter of absolute

uncertainty whether we got picked up at all, after escaping from the Island ; but the natural conclusion will be that, if we were, it was by a vessel bound for the colonies : homeward-bound ships do not take that course. Everyone at all acquainted with navigation knows that. I assure you, our being found by the whaler was the merest chance in the world. Be at ease, Charley. I can take care of myself, and I will leave Lambeth if necessary. One of these fine mornings you may get a note from me, telling you I have emigrated to the Isle of Dogs, or some such enticing quarter, and have become 'Mr. Smith.' Meanwhile, we can meet here occasionally."

"I don't like this place, Tom. It must inevitably be attended with more or less danger. Had I not better come to your lodgings?"

"No," he replied, after a moment's consideration. "I am quite sure that we are safe here, and there it's hot and stifling. A dozen families living in the same house. And I shall not tell you where the lodgings are, Charles : you might be swooping down upon me to carry me away as Mephistopheles carried away Dr. Faustus."

After supplying him with money, after a last handshake, whispering a last injunction to be cautious, I left the triangle, and left him within it. The next moment found me face to face with the burly frame and wary glance of Mr. Policeman Wren. He was standing still in the starlight. I walked past him with as much unconcern as I could muster. He turned to look after me for a time, and then continued his beat.

It gave me a scare. What would be the result if Tom met him unexpectedly as I had done? I would have given half I was worth to hover about and ascertain. But I had to go on my way.

"Can you see Lord Level, sir?"

It was the following Saturday afternoon, and I was just starting for Hastings. The week had passed in anxious labour. Business cares for me, more work than I knew how to get through, for Lennard was away ill, and constant mental torment about Tom. I took out my watch before answering Watts.

"Yes, I have five minutes to spare. If that will be enough for his lordship," I added, laughing, as we shook hands : for he had followed Watts into the room.

"You are off somewhere, Charles?"

"Yes, to Hastings. I shall be back again to-morrow night. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing," replied Lord Level. "I came up from Marshdale this morning, and thought I would come round this afternoon to ask whether you have any news."

When Lord Level went to Marshdale on the visit that bore so suspicious an aspect to his wife, he had remained there only one night, returning to London the following day. This week he had

been down again, and stayed rather longer—two days, in fact. Blanche, as I chanced to know, was rebelling over it. Secretly rebelling, for she had not brought herself to accuse him openly.

"News?" I repeated.

"Of Tom Heriot."

Should I tell Lord Level? Perhaps there was no help for it. When he had asked me before I had known nothing positively; now I knew only too much.

"Why I should have it, I know not; but a conviction lies upon me that he has found his way back to London," he continued. "Charles, you look conscious. Do you know anything?"

"You are right. He is here, and I have seen him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lord Level, throwing himself back in his chair. "Has he really been mad enough to come back to London?"

Drawing my own chair nearer to him, I bent forward, and in low tones gave him briefly the history. I had seen Tom on the Monday and Tuesday nights, as already related to the reader. On the Thursday night I was again at the trysting-place, but Tom did not meet me. The previous night, Friday, I had gone again, and again Tom did not appear.

"Is he taken, think you?" cried Lord Level.

"I don't know: and you see I dare not make any inquiries. But I think not. Had he been captured, it would be in the papers."

"I am not so sure of that. What an awful thing! What suspense for us all! Can *nothing* be done?"

"Nothing," I answered, rising, for my time was up. "We can only wait, and watch, and be silent."

"If it were not for the disgrace reflected upon us, and raking it up again to people's minds, I would say let him be re-taken! It would serve him right for his foolhardiness."

"How is Blanche?"

"Cross and snappish; unaccountably so: and showing her temper to me rather unbearably."

I laughed—willing to treat the matter lightly. "She does not care that you should go travelling without her, I take it."

Lord Level, who was passing out before me, turned and gazed into my face.

"Yes," said he emphatically. "But a man may have matters to take up his attention, and his movements also, that he may deem it inexpedient to talk of to his wife."

He spoke with a touch of haughtiness. "Very true," I murmured, as we shook hands and went out together, he walking away towards Gloucester Place, I jumping into the cab waiting to take me to the station.

Mrs. Brightman was better; I knew that; and showing herself more self-controlled. But there was no certainty that the improve-

ment would be lasting. In truth, the certainty lay rather the other way. Her mother's home was no home for Annabel; and I had formed the resolution to ask her to come to mine.

The sun had set when I reached Hastings and Miss Brightman's house. Miss Brightman, who seemed to grow less strong day by day, which I was grieved to hear, was in her room lying down. Annabel sat at the front drawing-room window in the twilight. She started up at my entrance, full of surprise and apprehension.

"Oh, Charles! Has anything happened? Is mamma worse?"

"No, indeed; your mamma is very much better," said I, cheerfully. "I have taken a run down for the pleasure of seeing you, Annabel."

She still looked uneasy. I remembered the dreadful tidings I had brought the last time I came to Hastings. No doubt she was thinking of it, too, poor girl.

"Take a seat, Charles," she said. "Aunt Lucy will soon be down."

I drew a chair opposite to her, and talked for a little time on indifferent topics. The twilight shades grew deeper; passers-by more indistinct, the sea less bright and shimmering. Silence stole over us; a sweet silence, all too conscious, all too fleeting. Annabel suddenly rose, stood at the window, and made some slight remark about a little boat that was nearing the pier.

"Annabel," I whispered, as I rose and stood by her, "you do not know what I have really come down for."

"No," she answered, with hesitation.

"When I last saw you at your own home, you may remember that you were in very great trouble. I asked you to share it with me, but you would not do so."

She began to tremble and became agitated, and I passed my arm round her waist.

"My darling, I now know all."

Her heart beat violently as I held her. Her hand shook nervously in mine.

"You cannot know all!" she cried piteously.

"I know all; more than you do. Mrs. Brightman was worse after you left, and Hatch sent for me. She and Mr. Close have told me the whole truth.

Annabel would have shrunk away, in the full tide of shame that swept over her, and a low moan broke from her lips.

"Nay, my dear, instead of shrinking from me you must come nearer to me—for ever. My home must be yours now."

She did not break away from me, and stood pale and trembling, her hands clasped, her emotion strong.

"It cannot, must not be, Charles."

"Hush, my love. It *can* be—and shall be."

"Charles," she said, her very lips trembling, "weigh well what you

are saying. Do not suffer the—the affection—I must speak fully—the implied engagement that was between us, ere this unhappiness came to my knowledge and yours—do not suffer it to bind you now. It is a fearful disgrace to attach to my poor mother, and it is reflected upon me.”

“Were your father living, Annabel, should you say the disgrace was also reflected upon *him*?”

“Oh, no, no. I could not do so. My good father! honourable and honoured. Never upon him.”

I laughed a little at her want of logic.

“Annabel, my dear, you have yourself answered the question. As I hold you to my heart now, so will I, in as short a time as may be, hold you in my home and at my hearth. Let what will betide, you shall have one true friend to shelter and protect you with his care and love for ever and for ever.”

Her tears were falling.

“Oh, please, please, Charles! I am sure it ought not to be. Aunt Lucy would tell you so.”

Aunt Lucy came in at that moment, and proved to be on my side. She would be going to Madeira at the close of the summer, and the difficulty as to what was to be done then with Annabel had begun to trouble her greatly.

“I cannot take her with me, you see, Charles,” she said. “In her mother’s precarious state, the child must not absent herself from England. Still less can I leave her to her mother’s care. Therefore I think your proposal exactly meets the dilemma. I suppose matters have been virtually settled between you for some little time now.”

“Oh, Aunt Lucy!” remonstrated Annabel, blushing furiously.

“Well, my dear, and I say it is all for the best. If you can suggest a better plan I am willing to hear it.”

Annabel sat silent, her head drooping.

“I may tell you this much, child: your father looked forward to it and approved it. Not that he would have allowed the marriage to take place just yet had he lived; I am sure of that; but he is not living, and circumstances alter cases.”

“I am sure he liked me, Miss Brightman,” I ventured to put in, as modestly as I could, “and I believe he would have consented to our marriage.”

“Yes, he liked you very much; and so do I,” she added, laughing. “I wish I could say as much for Mrs. Brightman. The opposition, I fancy, will come from her.”

“You think she will oppose it?” I said—and indeed the doubt had lain in my own mind.

“I am afraid so. Of course there will be nothing for it but patience. Annabel cannot marry without her consent.”

How a word will turn the scales of our hopes and fears! That

Mrs. Brightman would oppose and wither our bright prospects came to me in that moment with the certainty of conviction.

"Come what, come may, we will be true to each other," I whispered to Annabel the next afternoon. We were standing at the end of the pier, looking out upon the calm sea, flashing in the sunshine, and I imprisoned her hand momentarily in mine. "If we have to exercise all the patience your Aunt Lucy spoke of, we will still hope on and put our trust in heaven."

"Even so, Charles."

The evening was yet early when I reached London, and I walked home from the station. St. Mary's was striking half-past seven as I passed it. At the self-same moment, an arm was inserted into mine. I turned quickly, wondering if anyone had designs upon my small hand-bag.

"All right, Charley! I'm not a burglar."

It was only Lake. "Why, Arthur! I thought you had gone to Oxford until Monday!"

"Got news last night that the fellow could not have me: had to go down somewhere or other," he answered, as we walked along arm-in-arm. "I say, I had a bit of a scare just now."

"In what way?"

"I thought I saw Tom pass. Tom Heriot," he added in a whisper.

"Oh, but that's impossible you know, Lake," I said, though I felt my pulses quicken. "All your fancy."

"It was just under that gas-lamp at the corner of Wellington Street," Lake went on. "He was sauntering along as if he had nothing to do, muffled in a coat that looked a mile too big for him, and a red comforter. He lifted his face in passing, and stopped suddenly, as if he had recognised me, and were going to speak; then seemed to think better of it, turned on his heel and walked back the way he had been coming. Charley, if it was not Tom Heriot, I never saw such a likeness as that man bore to him."

My lips felt glued. "It could not have been Tom Heriot, Lake. You know Tom is at the Antipodes. We will not talk of him, please. Are you coming home with me?"

"Yes. I was going on to Barlow's Chambers, but I'll come with you instead."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN EVENING VISITOR.

THE spring flowers were showing themselves, and the May was budding in the hedges. I thought how charming it all looked as I turned, this Monday afternoon, into Mrs. Brightman's grounds, where laburnums drooped their graceful blossoms, and lilacs filled the air with their perfume; how significantly it all spoke to the heart of renewed life after the gloom of winter, the death and decay of nature.

Mrs. Brightman was herself enjoying the spring-tide. She sat, robed in crape, on a bench amidst the trees, on which the sun was shining. What a refined, proud, handsome face was hers ! but pale and somewhat haggard now. No other trace of her recent illness was apparent, except a nervous trembling of the hands.

"This is a surprise," she said, holding out one of those hands to me quite cordially. "I thought you had been too busy of late to visit me in the day-time."

"Generally I am very busy, but I made time to come to-day. I have something of importance to say to you, Mrs. Brightman. Will you hear me?"

She paused to look at me ; a searching, doubtful look. Did she fear that I was about to speak to her of her *failing* ? The idea occurred to me.

"Certainly," she coldly replied. "Business must, of course, be attended to. Would you prefer to go indoors or to sit out here?"

"I would rather remain here. I am not often favoured with such a combination of velvet lawn and sunshine and sweet scents.

She made room for me beside her. And, with as little circumlocution as possible, I brought out what I wanted—Annabel. When the heart is truly engaged, a man at these moments can only be bashful, especially when he sees it will be an up-hill fight : but if the heart has nothing to do with the matter, he can be as cool and suave as though he were merely telling an every-day story.

Mrs. Brightman, hearing me to the end, rose haughtily.

"Surely you do not know what you are saying !" she exclaimed. "Or is it that I fail to understand you ? You cannot be asking for the hand of my daughter ?"

"Indeed—pardon me—I am. Mrs. Brightman, we ——"

"Pardon *me*," she interrupted, "but I must tell you that it is utterly preposterous. Say no more, Mr. Strange ; not another word. My daughter cannot marry a professional man. I did so, you may reply : yes, and have forfeited my proper place in the world ever since."

"Mr. Brightman would have given Annabel to me."

"Possibly so, though I think not. As Mr. Brightman is no longer here, we may let that supposition alone. And you must allow me to say this much, sir—that it is scarcely seemly to come to me on any such subject so soon after his death."

"But ——" I stopped in embarrassment, unable to give my reason for speaking so soon. How could I tell Mrs. Brightman that it was to afford Annabel a home and a protector : that this, her mother's home, was not fitting for a refined and sensitive girl ?

But I pressed the suit. I told her I had Annabel's consent, and that I had recently been with her at Hastings. I should like to have added that I had Miss Brightman's, only that it might have done more harm than good. I spoke very slightly of Miss Brightman's

projected departure from England, when her house would be shut up and Annabel must leave Hastings. And I added that I wanted to make a home for her by that time.

I am sure she caught my implied meaning, for she grew agitated and her hands shook as they lay on her crape dress. Her diamond ring, which she had not discarded, flashed in the sunlight. But she rallied her strength. All her pride rose up in rebellion.

"My daughter has her own home, sir; her home with me—what do you mean? During my illness, I have allowed her to remain with her aunt, but she will shortly return to me."

And when I would have urged further, and pleaded as for something dearer than life, she peremptorily stopped me.

"I will hear no more, Mr. Strange. My daughter is descended on my side from the nobles of the land—you must forgive me for thus alluding to it—and it is impossible that I can forget that, or allow her to do so. Never, with my consent, will she marry out of that grade: a professional man is, in rank, beneath her. This is my decision, and it is unalterable. The subject is at an end, and I beg of you never again to enter upon it."

There was no chance of my pursuing it then, at any rate. Hatch came from the house, a folded cloak on her arm, and approached her mistress.

"The carriage is at the gate, ma'am."

Mrs. Brightman rose at once: she was going for a drive. After what had just passed, I held out my arm to her with some hesitation. She put the tips of her fingers within it, with a stiff "thank you," and we walked to the gate in silence. I handed her into the open carriage; Hatch disposed the cloak upon her knees, assisted by the footman. With a cold bow, Mrs. Brightman, who had already as coldly shaken hands with me, drove away.

Hatch, always ready for a gossip, stood within the little iron gate while she spoke to me.

"We be going away for a bit, sir," she began. "Did you know it?"

"No. Mrs. Brightman has not mentioned the matter to me."

"Well, we be then," continued Hatch; "missis and me and Perry. Mr. Close have got her to consent at last. I don't say that she was well enough to go before; Close thought so, but I didn't. He wants her gone, you see, Mr. Charles, to get that fancy out of her head about master."

"But does she still think she sees him?"

"Not for the past few days," replied Hatch. "She has changed her bedroom and taken to the best spare one; and she has been better in herself. Oh, she'll be all right now for a bit, if only——"

"If only what?" I asked, for Hatch had paused.

"Well, you know, sir. If only she can control herself. I'm certain she is trying to," added Hatch. "There ain't one of us would be

so glad to find it got rid of for good and all as she'd be. She's put about frightfully yet at Miss Annabel's knowing of it."

"And where is it that you are going to?"

"Missis talked of Cheltenham; it was early, she thought, for the sea-side; but this morning she got a Cheltenham newspaper up, and saw that amid the company staying there were Captain and Lady Grace Chantrey. 'I'm not going where my brother and that wife of his are,' she says to me in a temper—for, as I daresay you've heard, Mr. Charles, they don't agree. And now she talks of Brighton. Whatever place she fixes on, Perry is to be sent on first to take lodgings."

"Well, Hatch," I said, "the change from home will do your mistress good. She is much better. I trust the improvement will be permanent."

"Ah, if she would but take care! It all lies in that, sir," concluded Hatch, as I turned away from the gate, and she went up the garden.

We must go back for a moment to the previous evening. Leaving behind us the church of St. Clement Danes and its lighted windows, Lake and I turned into Essex Street, arm-in-arm, went down it, and reached my door. I opened it with my latch-key. The hall lamp was not lighted, and I wondered at Watts's neglect.

"Go on up to my room," I said to Lake; "I'll follow you in a moment."

He bounded up the stairs, and the next moment Leah came up from the kitchen with a lighted candle, her face white and terrified.

"It is only myself, Leah. Why is the lamp not alight?"

"Heaven be good to us, sir," she cried. "I thought I heard somebody go upstairs."

"Mr. Lake has gone up."

She dropped her candlestick upon the slab, and backed against the wall, looking more white and terrified than ever. I thought she was about to faint.

"Mr. Charles! I feel as if I could die! I ought to have bolted the front door."

"But what for?" I cried, intensely surprised. "What on earth is the matter, Leah?"

"He is up there, sir! Up in your front sitting-room. I put out the hall lamp, thinking the house would be best in darkness."

"Who is up there?" For in the moment's bewilderment I did not glance at the truth.

"Mr. Tom, sir. Captain Heriot."

"Mr. Tom! Up there?"

"Not many minutes ago, soon after Watts had gone out to church—for he was late to-night—there came a ring at the door bell," said Leah. "I came up to answer it, thinking nothing. A rough-looking

man stood, in a wide-awake hat, close against the door there. 'Is Mr. Strange at home,' said he, and walked right in. I knew his voice, and I knew him, and I cried out. 'Don't be stupid, Leah; it's only me,' says he. 'Is Mr. Charles upstairs? Nobody with him, I hope.' 'There's nobody to come and put his head in the lion's mouth, as may be said there at all, sir,' said I; and up he went, like a lamplighter. I put the hall lamp out. I was terrified out of my senses, and told him you were at Hastings, but I expected you in soon. And Mr. Charles," wound up Leah, "I think he must have gone clean daft."

"Light the lamp again," I replied. "It always *is* alight, you know. If the house is in darkness, you might have a policeman calling to know what was the matter."

Tom was in a fit of laughter when I got upstairs. He had taken off his rough over-coat and broad-brimmed hat, and stood in a worn—very much worn—suit of brown velveteen breeches and gaiters. Lake stared at him over the table, a comical expression on his face.

"Suppose we shake hands, to begin with," said Lake. And they clasped hands heartily across the table.

"Did you know me just now, in the Strand, Lake?" asked Tom Heriot.

"I did," replied Lake, and his tone proved that he meant it. "I said to Charley here, that I had just seen a fellow very like Tom Heriot; but I knew who it was, fast enough."

"You wouldn't have known me, though, if I hadn't lifted my face to the lamp-light. I forget myself at moments, you see," added Tom, after a pause. "Meeting you unexpectedly, I was about to speak as in the old days, and recollected myself only just in time. I say"—turning himself about in his velveteens—"should you take me for a gamekeeper?"

"No, I should not: you don't look the thing at all," I put in testily, for I was frightfully vexed with him altogether. "I thought you must have been taken up by your especial friend, Wren. Twice have I been to the trysting-place as agreed, but you did not appear."

"No; but I think he nearly had me," replied Tom.

"How was that?"

"I'll tell you," he answered, as we all three took chairs round the fire, and I stirred it into a blaze. "On the Wednesday I did not go out at all; I told you I should not. On the Thursday, after dusk, I went out to meet you, Charley. It was early, and I strolled in for a smoke with Lee and a chat with Miss Betsy. The old man began at once: 'Captain Strange, Policeman Wren has been here, asking questions about you. It seems old Wren is well known in the neighbourhood —'"

"Captain Strange?" cried Lake. "Who is Captain Strange?"

"I am—down there," laughed Tom. "Don't interrupt, please. 'What questions?' I said to Lee. 'Oh, what your name was, and

where you came from, and if I had known you long, and what your ship was called,' answered Lee. 'And you told him?' I asked. 'Well, I should have told him but for Betsy,' he said. 'Betsy spoke up, saying you were a sailor-gentleman that came in to buy tobacco and newspapers; and that was all he got out of us, not your name, captain, or anything. As Betsy said to me afterwards, it was not our place to answer questions about Captain Strange: if the policeman wanted to know anything, let him apply to the captain himself. Which I thought good sense,' concluded Lee. As it was."

"Well, Tom?"

"Well, I thought it about time to go straight home again," said Tom; "and that's why I did not meet you, Charley. And the next day, Friday, I cleared out of my diggings in that quarter of the globe, rigged myself out afresh, and found other lodgings. I am nearer to you now, Charley: vegetating in the wilds over Blackfriars Bridge."

"How could you be so imprudent as to come here to-night? Or to be seen in so conspicuous a spot as the Strand?"

"The fit took me to pay you a visit, old fellow. As to the Strand—it is a fine thoroughfare, you know, and I had not set eyes on it since last summer. I walked up and down a bit, listening to the church bells, and looking about me."

"You turn everything into ridicule, Tom."

"Better that, Charley, than into sighing and groaning."

"How did you know that Leah would open the door to you? Watts might have done so."

I had it all cut-and-dried. 'Is Mrs. Brown at home?' I should have said, in a voice Watts would never have known. 'Mrs. Brown don't live here,' old Watts would have answered; upon which I should have politely begged his pardon and walked off."

"All very fine, Tom, and you may think yourself amazingly clever; but as sure as you are living, you will run these risks once too often."

"Not I. Didn't I give old Leah a scare! You should have heard her shriek."

"Suppose it had been some enemy—some stickler for law and justice—that I had brought home with me to-night, instead of Lake?"

"But it wasn't," laughed Tom. "It was Lake himself. And I guess he is as safe as you are."

"Be sure of that," added Lake. "But what do you think of doing, Heriot? You cannot hide away for ever in the wilds of Blackfriars. I would not answer for your safety there for a day."

"Goodness knows," said Tom. "Perhaps Charley could put me up here—in one of his top bedrooms?"

Whether he spoke in jest or earnest, I knew not. He might remember that I was running a risk in concealing him even for an hour or two. Were it discovered, the law might make me answer for it.

"I should like something to eat, Charley."

Leaving him with Lake, I summoned Leah, and bade her bring up quickly what she had. She speedily appeared with the tray.

"Good old Leah!" said Tom to her. "That ham looks tempting."

"Mr. Tom, if you go on like this, loitering in the open streets and calling at houses, trouble will overtake you," returned Leah, in much the same tone she had used to reprimand him when a child. "I wonder what your dear, good mother would say to it if she saw you throwing yourself into peril. Do you remember, sir, how often she would beg of you to be good?"

"My mother!" repeated Tom, who was in one of his lightest moods. "Why you never saw her. She was dead and buried and gone to heaven before you knew anything of us."

"Ah well, Master Tom, you know I mean Mrs. Heriot—afterwards Mrs. Strange. It wouldn't be you, sir, if you didn't turn everything into a jest. She was a good mother to you all."

"That she was, Leah." Excused our lessons for the asking, and fed us on jam."

He was taking his supper rapidly the while; for of course he had to be away before church was over, and Watts was home again. The man might have been true and faithful, little doubt of it; but it would have added one more item to the danger.

Lake went out and brought a cab; and Tom, his wide-awake low on his brow, his rough coat on, and his red comforter round about his throat, vaulted into it, to be conveyed over Blackfriars Bridge to any point that he might choose to indicate.

"It is an amazing hazard his going about like this," cried Lake, as we sat down together in front of the fire. "He must be got out of England as quickly as possible."

"But he won't go."

"Then, mark my words, Charles, bad will come of it."

(To be continued.)



TEA-PLANTING IN ASSAM.

BY ARTHUR MONTEFIORE, F.R.G.S.

AMONG the various Jubilee celebrations of the year 1887, that of the great tea industry of India claimed a prominent place on the double score of its personal and financial interest to many thousands of our countrymen.

About twenty millions of British gold are invested in the tea-gardens of India, and some thousands of Englishmen are engaged in managing the half-a-million of coolies employed in the gardens. A brief resumé of the salient facts connected with the growth of this industry, and a description of life and labour on an Assamese tea-garden have, therefore, a special meaning at this time, and will be read with interest by the rapidly increasing class of consumers of Indian tea.

We have received this last year from India about ninety million pounds of tea. Moreover, in the month of May last, the proportion of Indian to Chinese tea in the English market, was as fifty-one to forty-nine. And yet, fifty years ago, not a score of pounds was imported into England. Fifty years ago a few pounds of Indian tea were sold in Mincing Lane at nineteen shillings a pound; to-day, a fairly good article can be bought for eighteenpence; and we are led to expect that the crop of 1890 will be sold in London at sixpence a pound!

China has been forced to yield its monopoly and take a second place, while British pertinacity and vigour have once more asserted their supremacy. In fact, the Caucasian has met the Celestial, and by sheer superiority, driven him step by step from his vantage ground.

Civilisation and its resources, coupled with its readiness and ability to make use of natural advantages, have undoubtedly been the cause of this. In India—and when we say India we mean the tea-districts of the Punjab, the Neilgherries, Bengal, but far and away ahead of them all, of Assam—when once the leaf is picked, the remaining treatment is entirely performed by machinery, which involves cheapness, rapidity and less variable results. Rollers and driers, equalisers and sifters, are all worked by steam in thoroughly well-appointed factories.

Not so, however, with the Celestial. With his well-known reverence for custom, it is not altogether surprising to find him still working with his own hands, as his fathers did aforetime; and in every stage of the manufacture the results are as less remunerative as they are less satisfactory.

Again, Assam has the advantage of China in its tea-plant.

The indigenous tree of Assam will grow to a height of twenty and

sometimes thirty feet, and the leaf it bears is large—six times as large as that produced by the dwarf shrub of China. Granted, even, that the conditions are the same, the crop of Assam is at least twice as much per acre as that of China.

But the conditions are far from identical; everything is on the side of Assam—science, nature, machinery, British energy and British capital. A scientific study and comprehension have enabled the Assamese tea-planters to combat successfully with one obstacle after another, and the probability is that in two or three years the quarter of a million acres now under cultivation will yield the marvellous total of 120,000,000 lbs. of first-rate tea, and the planters of Assam will then command the market.

Although the price of tea is rapidly declining, the cost of producing it fortunately diminishes *pari passu*; and the great tea-planting companies pay a good dividend and have every reason to be well satisfied.

Though the prophets of evil are abroad, tea-planting may still be regarded as a profitable investment, and as a lucrative as well as a pleasant mode of employing one's capital and one's labour. Many hundreds of our countrymen are leading busy lives and making a handsome income out of tea.

But it must be remembered that capital is an absolute essential to success. The longest and most valuable experience will never supply the want of capital in this industry. Capital and plenty of it is the first thing needful; then experience. The latter may be gained by working for two or three seasons as an assistant-overseer on some garden. It is not difficult to procure such an appointment, and the salary is amply sufficient for all ordinary needs.

Anyone who is going to Assam with this intention should make enquiries at the offices and head quarters of the numerous companies at Calcutta. A man of intelligence, who comes into the country with capital, is sure to be treated well, and will find no real difficulty in procuring an appointment. At the expiration of his "apprenticeship" he will either singly or in partnership, as his funds or his experience may require, enter on his career as a tea-planter, with a fair prospect of success before him.

The best soil for the tea-plant is a rich light loam, and this is fortunately not difficult to find.

As a rule the soil of Assam is wonderfully fertile, the great proportion of it being of an alluvial nature and rich in vegetable matters, with the accompanying advantages of phosphorus and potash. In some places a white, coarse sand "strikes" up, in which are found the grindings of lime rocks in abundance; and below all there is a general substratum of blue clay.

Assam is in configuration somewhat like a saucer; it is a vast plain or shallow basin, surrounded but not traversed by elevated regions. At one time it was undoubtedly one great bog, and even now peat may

be found all over the country at an average depth of fifty feet. When the damp heat of the climate is added to this, it is not to be wondered at that the country is as favourable to vegetation as it is inimical to the health of the European. Cholera and dysentery, jungle fever and dropsy, rank chief among the diseases of Assam; but the man who is temperate in all things and, particularly, withstands the too-general custom of "nipping," has every right to expect fair health. I have known men who enjoyed the most robust health and strength after many years' continuous residence in the country.

The culture of a tea garden cannot, of course, be described in full within the space of an article. Moreover, the methods vary with the size and situation of the garden, the number of labourers employed, and the amount of capital at command.

For example, a large number of planters have only a hundred acres under tea; while the Select Tea Company alone has 30,000 acres in Sylet, Assam, which are being rapidly brought under cultivation.

But the best-sized garden for the individual planter, as opposed to a company, is one of two-hundred-and-fifty acres. Such a garden will produce a large amount of tea, will pay for the best kinds of machinery, and should enable the proprietor in ordinarily good seasons to carry over to his reserve fund a handsome balance. The usual practice with a garden of this ultimate size is to plant out a hundred acres the first year, a hundred the second year, and the remaining fifty the third.

The Assam tea-plant, as has been stated, is indigenous to the country, and may be considered a tree, whilst the Chinese plant is a shrub. The former will frequently reach twenty and even thirty feet in height, while the latter seldom exceeds four feet. This tree is grown from the seed in nurseries, and at the age of nine months transplanted into the garden. The planting season extends over the months of December, January and February. Plucking begins when the tree is three years old, and at the age of eight years the tree is in its prime. The plucking season lasts from April till November; the first teas of a season generally arriving in this country in May.

The chief enemies to the tea-tree are insects.

In a tropical country like Assam these are numerous and large, and the labourers are constantly employed in ridding the crop from such pests, and applying preventives. Of hurtful insects the red spider and the green fly are the most dangerous.

Then, also, a parasitic fungus frequently appears on the bark, together with a white scale. Unless these are removed, the health and even the life of the tree is in jeopardy. In addition to insects and fungus, climatic influences sometime work much havoc with the delicate tea-tree. Exceptional drought in the dry season or severe frosts in the short cold season will often destroy a whole crop, although they seldom permanently damage the tree.

Cultivation goes on through the greater part of the year. The ground is carefully hoed and re-hoed several times, and, in some instances, harrowed; and the trees are carefully trained up in the first two years and pruned in the succeeding ones.

The heavier work is done by coolie-labour, but women and children are chiefly employed in plucking. As each batch of plucking is finished, the leaves are washed and then placed on large wire-gauze trays over charcoal *chulas*, or brick ovens. The washing, drying, rolling, sifting and distributing of the leaves over the *chulas* are done in most gardens by machinery.

When the process is complete, the crop is kept in bulk for a short time, and then packed in boxes that contain from eighty to a hundred-and-twenty pounds. These are sent by steamers to Calcutta, where the tea is sold to wholesale merchants at about fifty per cent. of the retail price in England.

A few figures as to cost and profit may be interesting; and, although of course they cannot represent individual cases of failure or success, they may be taken as giving a fair average representation of the tea-industry in Assam at the present time.

Supposing a man starts to make a garden two hundred and fifty acres in extent, he should be prepared to invest about £12,000 in his undertaking before he can expect to have a bearing garden, and a properly built factory thoroughly well furnished with machinery.

The average annual cost of cultivation will be from £8 to £9 per acre, that is to say, about £2,000 per annum. This item will include the wages of the coolies and their *sirdars*, or coolie overseers, and the maintenance of the buildings and machinery. On the other hand, his profits at the present time may, in ordinarily good seasons, be set down at about £5 per acre, which, in a full-bearing garden of two hundred and fifty acres, would be a net profit of £1,250 per annum—a very good return for a £12,000 investment.

Of course these figures refer only to average years and a properly handled garden; in exceptionally bad and good years the losses and profits would undoubtedly be greater.

The labourers are chiefly coolies imported from Bengal.

The native Assamese are intensely lazy, and leave their women to do most of the work. The native criminal class, however, is small: the general characteristics of the people being petty roguery, servility, and a contentment bred of fatalism. They are great consumers of *kari*, or opium, which makes them listless, and they require as much supervision at their work as the indigo-coolies of the Mofussil, the Madrassees on the paddy-fields of the south, or the negroes of the southern states of America.

Ordinary coolie labourers earn for the first three years five rupees a month, increasing to six rupees afterwards. Women get four rupees a month for the first three years and then rise to five rupees. Coolie overseers, or *sirdars*, get from ten to twelve rupees a month.


Assistant overseers, who are invariably Europeans, receive a salary of from £15 to £20 a month; and managers will draw salaries ranging from £300 to £600 per annum, with an almost invariable commission of five per cent.

About two coolies are required per acre, and, consequently, on a garden of two hundred and fifty acres there are about five hundred coolies, with their wives and children, in addition to their sirdars. The village which they create forms quite a populous centre; and as the proprietor of the gardens frequently contracts for their food-supply, they make a considerable claim upon his time and trouble.

Assam tea—and Indian tea generally—when manufactured, varies from Chinese tea in more ways than one. It is stronger than the latter; it makes the liquor into which it is infused darker in colour, thicker in quality, and more pungent in taste.

People have fancied from this that it is naturally coarser and inferior, and that it is more likely to play havoc with their nerves. This is a mistake. Indian tea, if mixed with a greater proportion of water or blended with the milder teas of China, in order to reduce it to the usual standard of strength, is as wholesome and aromatic as any produced on the globe.

At the present time it seems morally certain that the future of Indian tea is assured, and that the British empire will be able to supply all the tea which is at present consumed in the British Isles. Chinese tea will cease to be the chief staple of the market, but for a long time it will continue to be largely imported for the purpose of blending with Indian teas. Prices will be very low, and the planters of Assam will have to be unremitting in their efforts and economy if they desire to maintain the present very satisfactory returns from their tea-gardens.



A CAPRICCIO.

A Love Story.

CHAPTER VI.

"COME LET US KISS AND PART."

I LAY trembling in bed that night.

That Charlie should turn out to be Lady Corisande's "adorable angel," seemed too strange to be true. But now I understood it all. She was the beautiful cousin of whom he had spoken, and this grand old place, in which I had been living so unsuspectingly, was the home which, by rights, ought to belong to him, and which until the last ten years had been the family seat of the Everrils for centuries.

How dense I must have been not to have guessed it sooner. And now that I had at last learnt the truth, what was I to do? Give him up, and let him forget the silly little country lass, who was not half worth the sacrifice of wealth and ease, and of a beautiful home of which she would never make a fit and worthy mistress? Yes! There could be no doubt that that was my duty. I must return home at once, before matters became more complicated, and before Lady Corisande gave me an ignominious dismissal. If it were for Charlie's good, there was no sacrifice for which I was not ready—even to parting with him for ever, and dying (here two tears rolled down my cheeks and on to my pillow) and dying of a broken heart in the flower of my youth and beau——

A low, but only too expressive knock at the door checked my disconsolate reflections, making me start and turn cold with apprehension of Lady Corisande's wrath.

"Come in," I called weakly, scrubbing my cheeks to hide the trace of tears. "Come in."

The door slowly opened, and Lady Corisande entered, arrayed in a long dressing-gown of crimson satin, and holding a lighted candle in her hand.

"I wish to speak a few words to you," she said coldly, walking majestically up to my bedside. "Are you wide enough awake to attend to what I say?"

"Yes, madame," I whispered. Then there was a painful silence, whilst I glanced nervously at the handsome figure in its long red robes, and at the brilliant face which, just now, looked so haughty and forbidding.

"Celia," she began at last, "why have you deceived me? Why did you not tell me that Lord Everril was the person of whom you

have been thinking all this time, when you assured me it was 'nobody'?"

"How could I tell? Oh, madame, believe me. I did not *dream* that it was Char— Lord Everril whom you were expecting."

"Yes, you have deceived me," she went on bitterly. "After all my kindness to you, you have tried to rob me of the affection of one who is far above you. You have tried to come between us—to—to—in short," with increasing indignation, "to rival *me*—to steal him from *me*. Presumptuous child!"

"Indeed, not!" I cried with some warmth. "You would not tell me his name. I did not try to steal him from anyone; and I knew him long before I saw you. And I wish—I wish I had stayed at home and never come here to be accused of I know not what. Ah! how can you be so unkind?"

I was working myself into an angry excitement. After all, had I not the sweet assurance that *I* was the one he loved—and not this beautiful widow who looked upon him with such a provoking sense of rightful possession.

"You must go from here," she said, pacing up and down in front of my bed. "You cannot stay here; that is certain. But, as I do not see how you can leave me at a moment's notice, like this, for the next few days whilst you are here, you must promise to avoid him and to keep in your own place. If he desires to see you, you must have the *migraine*, and stay in your room. You must not meet under any circumstances."

"I understand, madame," I murmured. "I will obey you."

"You are young and foolish and romantic. But I forgive you. Only you must give up your silly little dream; it is an utter impossibility for both of you. He can never," she added scornfully, "have thought seriously of you; you are a mere baby. I am distressed to have to say it, but I am disappointed in you, Celia. Come! Do not cry. Such nonsense is not worth the trouble of tears."

With that she rose, patted my head, as much as to say that I was a baby incapable of understanding anything but a rattle, and sailed slowly out of the room; victorious, alas, over the poor, insignificant little maid who lay in bed, weeping her eyes out till the morning broke.

I remained in my room all the following day.

In the morning Lady Corisande paid me a short and not very amiable visit, leaving me a little more miserable than she had found me.

This time she tried persuasion instead of reproach. She represented to me how much misery Lord Everril's marriage with me would entail, and how injurious it would be to him in every respect. I was helpless in such hands, and believed her implicitly. I was not

versed in the ways of the world, nor had I learnt how literally true it is that "Noblesse oblige."

As Lady Corisande went on piling up the agony, convincing me of what vital importance it was that Lord Everril should "marry money," and keep up the old name in its former glory, I began to marvel at my own overweening presumption.

"But," I ventured to suggest timidly, "why should he keep up the name, madame, against his will? What does it mean—to *keep up a name*? He will always be an Everril, and if he wishes to cover the name with glory will poverty prevent him? Is it not industry and perseverance that bring men fame and honour?"

"Little simpleton! Do you think the future Everrils, living on an income of £1,000 or £2,000 a-year, will count as *anybodies*? No! They will disappear as though they had never existed, and be heard of no more. And why? Because of a ridiculous, boyish whim, and because a vain child aspires to wear a coronet, forsooth! although she brings ruin and misfortune on a whole family by her obstinacy."

"It is not that!" I cried, almost dancing with rage, whilst Bijou and Mignon rushed at me, yelping discordantly, and pecking viciously at my skirts. "I would not wear a coronet if you were to offer me one this minute. If anyone is like that, and is *vulgar*, it is the Everrils and Derings themselves, with their vulgar pride of money, and old names, and noblesse oblige, and all that. If *that* is a sign of glory," with withering contempt, "and of good birth, then I am *proud* to be a nobody."

When I paused, out of breath, looking, I am sure, very unheroic, with my tumbled hair, flushed cheeks, and features of childish wrath, I fully expected Madame to bring down the house over my head, or otherwise to annihilate me for my temerity.

But to my surprise she said nothing; merely rose with great dignity, and left me without another word or glance.

This was the day on which Charlie's mother was to arrive at Brantwood with her daughters, Lady Jane and Lady Blanche. About four o'clock that afternoon I watched the carriage drive up to the front door, heard gay voices and laughter, and presently saw the happy party strolling about the lawn and shrubberies. And then I sat down and cried disconsolately, because they all seemed to get on so *very* well without me.

I began to tire dreadfully of my imprisonment. My thoughts grew sentimental and morbid, and I examined myself in the looking-glass, in melancholy hopes of finding the hectic spot on each cheek that is said to betoken an early death of consumption. Alas! I was still plump and healthy, with no apparent physical change, except that my eyes were dull and my eyelids red; and somehow that did not help to make me look interesting.

Nevertheless I was sincerely miserable; and I was beginning to

feel almost tragic, when there came a knock at the door, and Madame again entered.

She looked more like her usual self, and actually stroked me on the cheeks calling me her "poor, sad little shepherdess."

But the torture was not yet over; and this time it was all the harder to bear because it came in a form there was no resisting, just from its plausible gentleness.

My girlish innocence was but a poor weapon to use against the finesse of Lady Corisande's diplomacy, and my submission was a mere matter of time and patience and skilful argument.

She told me how she and all his relations and friends loved Charlie as surely no young man ever had the fortune—or misfortune—of being loved before. How they trusted to him to redeem his family, and to be the "world's gay favourite" in all things. How it had been almost as good as settled that she and Charlie should marry each other. And how Lady Everril and the whole noble race of Derings had put on sackcloth and ashes and were reduced to despair, simply through the coming of an insignificant little companion—a child who had no "name to keep up," and nothing to call her own save, perhaps, a pretty face and a pair of bright eyes.

"After knowing all this," Lady Corisande concluded, "will you still persist in being the apple of discord amongst us, Celia?"

"No—I will not," I replied; adding half under my breath: "For you have cut me in two, between you all."

"You will mend. You are young, and this is but a child's fancy. I can trust you, cannot I, Celia?"

"Trust me?" I cried. "Only try."

"That is my wise shepherdess again. Good-night. Take a run in the garden whilst we are at dinner. No one is about. It will bring back your roses, and you will soon be as gay as ever, and as happy."

"No, not happy," I thought sadly. "Never so happy again. Oh, mother, why did you ever send me from you?"

Then a sudden impulse made me seize Lady Corisande's hand as she was leaving the room, and exclaim wistfully:

"Oh, madame, only tell me this. Does *he* have nothing to say in the matter? Is he ready to obey others, even in this?"

"Noblesse oblige," she said coldly, and so left me.

The fresh evening air restored my spirits a little, as I ran in and out of the shrubberies, gloveless and hatless, that the soft breeze might cool my forehead and swollen eyelids.

There is something about the soft, misty summer gloaming that makes it seem, so I always think, to belong especially to lovers.

The silence; the quiet, shadowy twilight stealing like sweet sleep over the land; the distant tinkle of sheep-bells and the lowing of cattle as they are driven home through the meadows; the gentle sough of dying breezes in the high tree-tops; all this is dedicated to lovers' vows and heart flutterings. At least so it seems to me. For, though

I am an old woman now, whenever the long summer evenings come again, my thoughts rush back to that twilight hour in the garden, when my heart was bursting with love, and calling out for Charlie to be at my side—here, where there was no one to disturb our quiet, but the cooing wood-pigeons, and now and then a rabbit that rushed away at the sound of a footstep.

When I came in again and ran stealthily up to my room, I found a tempting little supper laid out for me: and, neatly folded up in a napkin, my first and my last billet-doux!

How I blushed and trembled as, with eager fingers, I tore it open and read the few, hastily-scrawled lines.

I have that note still; and now that I am older and wiser I can see that it is very sentimental and ridiculous; so ridiculous that I should be afraid to copy it out here, if I did not know that the young folk who take a flight in the "Fool's Paradise" nowadays are not one whit more sensible than they were in the good old times.

"Sweetest heart," it ran, "this is to assure you that my love will last for ever. If we may not marry with the consent of my family, we will marry without it. Let me have a few words to say that you are true to me. I long for a glance at your dear face and eyes. Be brave, dear one, and faithful.

EVERRIL.

"P.S. If I can't get over that French fiddlestick I will see myself hung."

How I kissed that little note and cried over it, praying for strength to act as was best for Charlie.

For my mind was made up on the side of self-sacrifice. Lady Corisande, on eloquently convincing me that it was really for Charlie's good that she wished me to give him up to her, had won the day.

It seemed hard and cruel to leave his note unanswered. What could I say? Should I be brave, and put an end to our little love story with a few cold words that would save us the pain and misery of meeting only to part for ever?

"It is for his sake," I kept whispering to myself; and then I hastily wrote a little answer to his letter, heedless that it was all blotched and slurred by my tears.

When the maid came to take away my supper she lingered a moment.

"Can I take an answer to the note?" she asked presently. "It won't go no further than me, miss."

"It is no secret," I said, as haughtily as I could. "Yes; you may take this note; and say that it is the *last*, and that I will receive no others."

With that, I carelessly gave her a folded slip of paper that held my death-blow, as I told myself tragically, and which might, just at first, make Charlie, too, sorry that we had ever met.

It ran thus :

"DEAR LORD EVERRIL,—It is best that we should not meet again. As we were foolish in the past, let us be wise in the future. Allow me to wish you and Lady Corisande every happiness.

"I don't mind a bit, Charlie, if *you* are happy.

"CELIA RANDOM."

What a grand commencement ! But what a lame, very lame conclusion !

CHAPTER VII.

"UNCERTAIN, COY AND HARD TO PLEASE."

MEANTIME, I did not intend to be kept much longer a prisoner at the will of my capricious mistress ; and the next day I told Lady Corisande that, if she had not already done so, I must write to my mother telling her to expect me home at the earliest opportunity. Madame made no objection. In fact I felt that she was longing to be rid of me ; but her manner to me was certainly kinder than it had been since Lord Everril's arrival ; and as a proof of her restored goodwill and trust she gave me permission to walk in the woods whenever I pleased.

"You will find it pleasant and quiet there," she added ; "and it is not likely that you will be annoyed by meeting us."

It was on the tip of my tongue to observe that the annoyance would not be on my side, but, fearing to forfeit this slight return to liberty, I refrained, and only expressed my gratitude for her kindness.

Glad of anything to relieve the monotony of my dull and solitary days, I availed myself of her offer ; and running through the garden presently found myself in the cool shade of the woods, and free—as I understood from Lady Corisande's words—from any fear of meeting him whom I most longed, yet most dreaded to see.

The sun, glinting through rifts in the thick foliage, flecked the mossy carpet under my feet with dancing yellow lights ; birds were chirruping in the trees, with a peculiar succulent sound that made the whole wood seem to resound with the soft kisses of children ; and in the distance I could hear laughter and chattering from the labourers in the fields, as they turned the sweetly-smelling hay.

I, alone, was desolate and solitary. It was little use trying to persuade myself that I must be sensible and strong-minded ; for to tell the truth, I was as thoroughly miserable as I could be. I daresay anyone who hears this little story from my own lips, will imagine that my feelings for Charlie were neither very deep nor very strong. I have no words to explain what I felt for him ; it was too firmly fixed in my heart to bear probing into ; and even in those days, when it was all passionately fresh and vivid, to outward appearance I was self-contained and undemonstrative.

I can only say that I loved him. Sometimes I took a half-melancholy pleasure in comparing our misfortunes with those of Romeo and the fair Capulet, and then I would repeat to myself those tender words of sixteen-year-old Juliet :

" My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep ; the more I give to thee
The more I have, for both are infinite."

I was thinking somewhat in this strain, when I heard the patter of feet behind me, and a breathless voice calling my name. My first instinct was to hide, knowing how dire would be Madame's wrath should she discover that I had spoken to Lord Everril, when a nearer call assured me that it was not Charlie but M. le Comte who was following me.

This gallant and exquisitely-dressed little Frenchman always gave me the impression that he could not run even to save his life. He was like a Dresden china figure, more for ornament than for use ; and now that he was exerting himself to such unusual effort, his appearance, when he approached me, was bordering on the ludicrous. His neck-tie was awry, he was panting for breath, and his greeting bow had lost its customary grace.

" Ah ! I thought so," he panted. " When I saw a—fairy—form—flit—past, I said : ' Voilà ! There goes the victime.' "

" Victim ! " I answered bitterly. " Say rather the apple of discord and dissension, as Madame has it."

" Victime all the same," he replied. " Victime to the caprice of an eccentric grande dame. You are much to be pitied for that, it seems to me. Tell me, my pretty Célie, art thou very sad ? "

" No, indeed, monsieur," I returned proudly. " I begin not to care at all, and to see that I have been much mistaken in the goodness and generosity of the ' noblesse.' "

" Then you love not this beau garçon—this brave young man who is like an Apollo, and who is, of all things, the most charming ? "

He was a curious little creature, this French exquisite, with his curled moustachios, sparkling dark eyes and quaintly turned phrases. I hardly knew whether or not to resent his questions, and answered in a scarcely audible voice :

" No, monsieur."

" That is a pity. For do you not know that he is in despair for you, and ready to commit any foolishness for your sake ? "

In spite of a certain affectation of manner, the Comte was one of the most kind-hearted men in the world, and I read in his face such unfeigned sympathy and desire to comfort me, that my pride was disarmed, and I cried pathetically :

" And I, monsieur, would do *anything* for him. Ah, that is what makes me so miserable."

" Now I begin to see. You say to yourself, ' Here am I, without

rank, without fortune—it is not for his good to love me. And there is his cousin who is rich and beautiful; if he marries her he wins back his estate, his moneys. Therefore, I will be a willing victim and resign him—for true love's sake.' Have I not reason, mademoiselle? You need not fear me. I am come to give you all my help."

"Oh, you are too kind," I cried, touched by these first words of pity or sympathy that I had received. "Everyone but you says I am in the wrong. What can I do? It is not to be expected that Madame should give him up! And I would *rather*, I would, indeed, let him think that I do not much mind, so that he may marry her and forget me, and be happy. Then all would come right."

"For him—yes. The truth is," and here M. le Comte lowered his voice confidentially: "the adorable Corisande is, not alone capricious, but also eccentric. The one dream of her life is—matrimony! She is not now so young as she was; and clever and beautiful though she is, it is not everyone who would have the courage to take her for his wife. And so it is that only one or two insignificant—what is it you call them?—*nobodies*, have wished to marry with her. But she is haughty; they are not good enough for her. There is only this young lord who seems to her suitable; and conceive, mademoiselle, what she must feel when you, with your beaux yeux, come and steal his heart from her. It must be hard, that."

"If only she truly cared for him, I could bear it better," I said.

"Oh! monsieur, is there no hope for me?"

"One," he said, taking hold of one of my hands. "Only one."

"Is there one? Oh! what is it? Tell me—is it anything that I can do—that I can say?"

"Parfaitement. You have but to be docile—to be what you always are, mademoiselle. It is—you will not be angry?"

"No, no! Tell me. There is nothing I will not do."

"It is to allow me *to make my love to you*," said the Comte, with a low bow, and an expressive glance from his dark eyes, as he raised my hand gently to his lips.

"Ah! monsieur. How can you be so unkind—so cruel?"

I snatched my hand from him indignantly. Was he laughing at me, and amusing himself at the expense of my innocence and grief? Or did he really mean what he had said? It was impossible that he could be serious. He had only raised my hopes to dash them to the ground with cruel mockery and insult. My heart was bursting with anger and misery; and I was turning away, almost crying with disappointment and outraged feelings, when he detained me by laying a fatherly hand on my shoulder.

"Come, come, mademoiselle," he said kindly; "you misunderstand me. As I have said, you have but to be docile. It is only a little ruse of which I have been thinking. It is for your good, and also for mine."

"But I do not see how," I cried, more and more puzzled. "What good *can* it do?"

"Listen. First, there is Madame, who is above all things—jealous."

"Yes. Indeed she is."

"Second, there is you, the victim, who loves this young nobleman."

"Yes. But what of all that, monsieur?"

"And last, there is me, who loves the adorable Corisande!"

Having said this he drew himself upright, and touched his heart with his hand, with an old-fashioned, sentimental air of gallantry that at any other time would have moved me to laughter.

But now I was so overcome by surprise that words failed me, and I stared at him in wondering silence as he stood before me in that heroic attitude, and with such genuine emotion in his face.

"Do not mistake me," he went on presently; "when I find in her faults. With me, love is not blind; and when I say that she is capricious, jealous, eccentric, it means not that I care for her the less because of these little faults. On the contrary, they are ravishing in my eyes."

"Hark!" I interrupted. "Someone comes."

"And I have your promise," he went on, heedless of my caution and raising his voice. "Mademoiselle, how happy you have made me. My affection——"

"Oh, please don't!" I whispered eagerly. "It is she; it is Madame herself."

I seemed fated to be thrust in Lady Corisande's path; already she was close beside us, and could not have failed to overhear M. le Comte's last remarks.

"Monsieur seems to be amusing himself," she said, in clear, cold ones; "I have been wondering what had become of him. Ah! Celia? So it is you, is it?"

"It is an Arcadia here in the wood," M. le Comte hastened to answer. "It is a place to live in for ever."

"With Celia as Arcadian shepherdess," she replied with a sarcastic laugh. "Sweet simplicity in the woodlands."

"Exactly. How the idea is appropriate. Sweet simplicity."

"Perhaps you would prefer to remain here and finish your idyll? Or are you disposed to join us in the garden, where we are regaling ourselves with fruit and cream?" said Madame, in a way that admitted of but one answer. "Au revoir, Celia. Do not lose yourself in these woods."

M. le Comte kissed the tips of his fingers to me, and, to my dismay, bent on me a look of such exaggerated admiration that I blushed for shame as Madame's eyebrows rose contemptuously. As she left me, she gave me a glance she might have thrown to her waiting-maid had the latter ventured to thwart her will; and I could not feel that M. le

Comte's well-meant intrigue had done more than precipitate me yet farther in my slough of despond.

I watched the two figures strolling down the green pathway, where the branches made a fairy bower over their heads; and when they were out of sight, I sank on the mossy carpet and burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

Here was a strange state of affairs! And not the least strange part of it was M. le Comte's love for Lady Corisande, and his very original method of showing it.

It was finally arranged that I should leave Brantwood on Monday (it being now Thursday), and it may be imagined how eagerly I longed once more to be at home, where I could pour out my sorrows in my mother's sympathetic ears, and be petted and soothed and comforted in her loving arms.

The life that I was leading was irksome in the extreme; even the woods had their limits, and in a day or two I had thoroughly explored them. I began to feel like a caged animal. What right had Madame to treat me thus? Why should I give up my love to please her? Why should I not come boldly forward and bid Charlie choose between us?

Ah! why not? I loved him; and that is why I tried to learn the bitter lesson of self-renunciation for his sake.

Now and then, when I was wandering through the woods, M. le Comte d'Estrées contrived to meet me, and raised my spirits a little by his kindness, his quaint mannerisms and oddly-turned phrases. And when we were together it invariably happened, much to my annoyance, that we were discovered by Lady Corisande; and then her lips would tighten, and her whole demeanour expressed disapproval of my want of propriety and apparent coquetry—as if I, alas! could help it.

And once—ah! how well I recollect the wild joy, mingled with pain of that meeting—as I was walking round a turn in the pathway, with my head bent in maiden meditation, whom should I meet but Charlie, of whom I had been dreaming, and for whom I had been longing so earnestly.

Fate certainly did not aid me to keep my resolution of self-sacrifice.

Before I could say a word, he had seized my hand and kissed it.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "I have found you, my faithless little Amaryllis."

"Oh, but you must go from me," I said hurriedly, turning my face away that he should not read in it my joy at once more hearing his voice. "Please leave me at once."

"Not I. Do you think it is likely?" he said gaily; "or are you still cruel? I never believed you could be so hard-hearted, Celia. That unkind little note ought to have burnt your fingers as you wrote

it. Am I to believe that you were in earnest, and really meant to give me up? I will not believe it."

"It is best so," I replied, struggling hard not to break down, and crying over and over to myself: "Be brave, *for his sake*." "You have no right to come after me when I have begged you to leave me in peace."

"No right? Why, Celia, what does it all mean? Am I to go away, and believe that you never cared for me after all? I, who love you with my whole heart and soul."

"It is best so," I repeated drearily. "It is best for both of us."

"If it is your wish, I can have nothing else to say," he answered, drawing himself up stiffly and speaking very coldly. "No doubt, as Lady Corisande says, it is your pleasure to exchange a penniless Englishman for a rich French—fool. It is not for me to argue with you on such a subject."

"You are right," I returned, equally coldly. "On such a subject, as you say, I may have the privilege of making up my own mind."

He was white with suppressed passion. It was only by keeping my own eyes bent on the ground that I could prevent his gaze from tearing my secret from me.

"Then I am to give it up?" he said, below his breath. "Is it all over between you and me, Celia?"

I looked helplessly away from him, up into the dark tree-tops, praying for courage. "For his sake," sighed the wind, "for his sake. Let your love be infinite."

"Yes," I said quietly; "it is all over now."

"Good," he said gravely, turning on his heel. "Let it be so."

Yes, it was all over; the die was cast; and as I wandered home, tired and broken-spirited, I prayed that I might have acted for his good. And I wept until my eyes were heavy and red for the love which I had thrust from me with my own hand, to humour the caprice of Lady Corisande and to save the house of Everril from an untimely and lamentable ruin.

The next morning, just as I was writing my last letter to my mother, Lady Corisande's maid came to me, and asked me to come at once to her mistress.

"Madame is seriously indisposed," she said. "She is suffering from a *migraine*, and is unmanageable. She will not eat, yet she desires breakfast. She knows not what she wants, and yet she rings for me every other minute, and is as cross as thunder."

"Did she send for me?" I asked.

"No, mademoiselle. But last time Madame was ill she liked to have you with her, and said you soothed her nerves. So if you would be so kind, mademoiselle. I am sure *I* can do nothing with her."

I was scarcely in the humour to soothe Madame's nerves, but I

followed Justine to her room, feeling a faint satisfaction in the thought that perhaps I should be enabled to heap coals of fire on the head of my pitiless adversary.

Lady Corisande's room was darkened, that the light should not hurt her eyes, and she did not hear me enter, or take any notice when I quietly took up my position in an armchair at the foot of the bed, ready to attend to the sufferer should she mention a desire for anything.

Madame's migraine was generally a sign that she was ill-tempered or disappointed about something. But to-day she really appeared to be suffering physically as well as mentally, for every now and then I could catch a deep-drawn sigh, and a murmur of :

"Ah ! my poor head. Who is there that cares how I feel ?"

Did, then, this strange woman, who could be so charming and loveable, and yet at the same time so selfish and despotic, sometimes crave for a love and sympathy that was not hers, as other women crave ? Perhaps M. le Comte's estimate of her character was a true one, and she was more to be pitied for her capricious temperaments, than disliked for her unreasonable follies. At all events I tried to think so ; and told myself that under the tenderness and goodness of her future husband her character would soften and develop until she was worthy to be loved even by him.

"Ah ! well," I heard her mutter ; " I am getting to be an old woman now and a fool. Bah ! How ridiculous it is to be sure."

Then she lay back exhausted, complaining now and again of the pain in her head, and of her loneliness and uselessness. When she became quieter, I rose gently, and steeping a handkerchief in eau-de-cologne bathed her hot forehead, and gently fanned it, hoping that its soothing effect would send her to sleep. For some time she did not move or speak ; then she opened her eyes and inquired languidly :

"Is it you, Justine ?"

"It is Celia, dear madame. Are you feeling better ?"

"A little. But my head is still heavy. How gentle your touch is, child. Do you add sick nursing to your other charms ?"

"If my mother is ill, or Aunt Rebecca, it is I who nurse them. But it is mamma who has taught me how to do it. If any of us are in pain it is always she who takes care of us, and comforts us."

"Happy child, to be so loved. I have no one—no one."

"Oh, yes, madame. You have so many. It is only your head that makes you feel sad. Everyone is fond of you ; you do not need to be told that."

"Yes—they were—until *you* came !" she cried vehemently. "And you have stolen two hearts from me already."

"I have not," I said quickly. "It is unfair to say so."

"You cannot deny it. First there was Lord Everril ; and now there is M. le Comte. It is preposterous ! And yet you can come and talk to me as if you were innocent. Impertinent !"

"It is not true," I exclaimed hotly, all the pent-up resentment of the last few days surging up within me. "And if it were true—what of it? Do you want everything? Do you grudge me the smallest crumb of comfort? What can you want with M. le Comte, when you have—Charlie?" Then I paused aghast at my audacity. As for Lady Corisande, I really believe she thought a thunder-bolt had fallen, to judge from her expression of intense amazement.

I have since learnt from experience, that with domineering natures it is by no means always a soft answer that turneth away wrath; but that, on the contrary, a spirited rejoinder will often have the effect of scattering their pride and anger like chaff before a strong wind.

But in those days I had not discovered this peculiarity, and the least that I expected was to be turned out of the house then and there, and left to find my way home as best I could.

For fully five minutes, Lady Corisande was silent, her eyes searching my face intently.

Then she said, quite meekly:

"Forgive me, Celia. I was unjust. But, after all, you must allow that my suspicions are not entirely unprovoked. You certainly did—*try*—to win Charlie's affections; that is now past and over. But now—though I will not say you are entirely to blame—is it not a fact that M. le Comte is paying marked attentions to you?"

"No, madame," I said, with difficulty concealing my amusement. "Far from it."

"Yet he is always running after you. When I see you together I cannot help seeing that there is something between you. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps. Yes, he is very kind to me."

"And he talks confidentially to you?"

"Yes. He has certainly confided things to me."

"There! I thought so," and her voice trembled. "I have known him for years, and yet he never gets beyond bare civilities; and to you, whom he hardly knows, he takes his confidences. Do not be afraid. I am not angry. It is only that you are charming, whilst I am an eccentric old idiot, full of foolish fancies. Old? Ah! yes, that is the truth."

With a sudden impulse I went and knelt by her side, and stroking one of her beautiful white hands, spoke to her just as I should have done to one of the children at home.

"It is true that he confides in me, madame, and talks to me a great deal. But when he talks it is always of you; what he confides to me are his hopes that some day you will care for him; his conversation is of nothing but the 'adorable Corisande.' You see that it is you who have all the love, and I that have none."

"You are a good girl, Celia," she exclaimed. "If I have seemed cruel to you, remember that it could not be helped. And, after all, you do not seem to be unhappy; and recollect that you have many

years before you, whereas I am on the brink of old age. No—do not contradict me. Perhaps I shall not see you again before you leave on Monday. In case I do not, here is a little parting gift, as a token of forgiveness on both sides. If it—that is my engagement—is arranged before you go, you must come and wish me joy, as a proof that you bear me no ill-will. Good-bye, Celia. You are a dear, good little thing, and I shall not forget you.”

Then, to my surprise, she put her arms round my neck and embraced me, French fashion, on both cheeks.

I took the little pearl and diamond ring she held out to me, made my farewell as gracefully as I could under the circumstances, and left her, marvelling more than ever at the contradictory nature which was, in some respects, so forgiving and generous.

To-morrow all would be at an end ; and then good-bye to Charlie for evermore, and home again to the boys and my mother, and good old Aunt Rebecca.

CHAPTER VIII.

LED TO THE SACRIFICE.

IT might have been expected that my spirits should regain their old serenity as the time drew near for me to leave Brantwood ; and yet, strangely enough, that last Sunday found me more sad and desolate than I had felt on any other day. The life that I was going back to would never be what it had been in the old light-hearted days before I had committed the folly of falling in love with a man who could never be anything more than a formal acquaintance to me. And though I knew, in my heart, that there was no hope for me, so long as I remained within reach of him, I clung, against all reason, to a desperate belief that by some miracle things would be made right for us even yet.

At least I must look on his face once more, if only to see if he were happy ; if my sacrifice had been worth making ; if he had forgotten me and the love he had once professed for me.

I knew that if Lady Corisande and her friends went to church they must pass under the window of my room ; and long before there was a chance of seeing them I was at my post, waiting to take a stolen glance at Charlie for the last time ; and, I am sorry to say, sometimes finding my sight quite obscured by a blinding mist of tears.

But about eleven o'clock my patience was rewarded. I heard approaching voices and footsteps, and presently the whole party passed under my eyes. First, bearing a huge bible and prayer book, and escorted by an old gentleman, came Lady Everril, followed by two tight-laced and decorous young women whom I supposed were her daughters. Next came Madame, with Charlie on one side and M. le Comte on the other.

I thought Charlie looked rather cross, but when Lady Corisande

turned and whispered something to him, his face brightened, and his whole manner underwent a change from sullen gravity to sudden delight. She nodded, smiled, blushed, as he kissed her hand with irrepressible enthusiasm ; and together they passed on into the sunlight—leaving me, weeping alone in the shadows.

However, it was only what I had expected, and I managed to control myself into a strained calmness, now that the blow had actually fallen with all its weight.

No doubt I should soon be sent for to pay my respects and make my congratulations, and until that ordeal was over I was determined to show an indomitable courage and fortitude. Time enough after that to break down and give way to the weakness and folly of useless longings and regrets. But, all the same, I thought it was cruel of Lady Corisande to have insisted on that. What benefit would my good wishes bring to her ? I should, indeed, as M. le Comte had said, be like a victim brought to the sacrifice. Still, there was some faint recompense in the knowledge that I had acted for the best ; and when I saw Lady Everril's kind, high-bred face, and the gentle ones of her daughters, I felt glad that I was not the cause of trouble and annoyance to them.

About four o'clock that afternoon, Justine brought me a little note that ran as follows :

"DEAREST CELIA,—All is settled. I am the happiest woman in the world. Will you let by-gones be by-gones, and come to us and wish us joy ?
CORISANDE."

"Tell her I will come," I said, turning quite cold and faint. "I will be there in a few minutes."

The maid paused uneasily, glancing curiously at me.

"Are you ill, mademoiselle ?" she asked. "You are white like snow, and you have saucers round your eyes black as coals. May I fetch you some sal-volatile ?"

"No, no. It is nothing. It is only that I am sick to death of being pent up here. Where is Lady Corisande ?"

"In the garden, mademoiselle. They are all in the arbour. And I am sure," she added compassionately, "that company will do mademoiselle good. It is not right for the young to be always alone."

Slowly I crept down stairs, and as slowly walked down the long, rose-bordered path which led towards the arbour where Lady Corisande awaited me.

I had caught a glimpse of myself in the long mirror at the foot of the staircase, and saw a white face with drooping lips, and eyes shining out of great dark shadows. I was ashamed to be seen like that, and though I rubbed my cheeks to bring some colour to them, I knew that my appearance would betray my feelings, no matter how firmly I strove to conceal them.

The test was too hard for me ; and suddenly I came to a standstill, and flinging my arms round one of the rose-trees, buried my face in my hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

All the grief and longing of my love seemed to rush over me just then. The future was so dreary, so endless, so hopeless, without him. I could not bear to think that perhaps we should never meet again, and that if we did we should only be Lord Everril and Miss Random to each other; not Charlie and Celia, the boy and girl whose hands and lips had met one golden day in a little room in a London street, and who had been so radiant, so happy, so hopeful.

"Oh, Charlie, why did you tell me you loved me, if it was of no use?" I sighed, as I lifted my doleful face and walked slowly on. "If only you had never spoken to me—never made me think that mamma and the children were not the whole world to me."

When I came within sight of the harbour, I saw that Lady Corisande, Charlie, with his mother and sisters and M. le Comte, were all there watching for me. When I drew near, Lady Everril rose and planted a solemn, maternal embrace upon her son's cheek—an example which the two girls followed with little pecks of sisterly affection; which sudden demonstration appeared slightly disconcerting and embarrassing to Lord Everril. Then they sailed out of the harbour, each giving Lady Corisande's hand a congratulatory squeeze as she passed; and when I came up, shy and trembling, I found myself alone with Madame and the two gentlemen.

There was a moment of awkward silence. Charlie was intent upon slaughtering some innocent flies that buzzed round his hat; Madame looked agitated, and kept making hasty little dabs at her eyes with a lace pocket handkerchief. But presently she cleared her throat, raised her head and began, in a half-hesitating way:

"I have sent for you, Celia, to—to tell you of my great happiness. I am sure you will—wish me joy—and sympathise with me, and—forgive all that is past."

"Yes, dear madame," I said, dazedly. "I wish you all joy, and cannot express to you how—glad——"

I paused, unable to go on. A mist rose before my eyes, through which I saw only Charlie's face, indistinct and vague. My hands fell to my side, my breath came in little suppressed sobs. Had they no pity? Was not the sacrifice over yet, to which the poor little victim had been brought so helplessly, so forlornly?

"She does not understand," broke in M. le Comte's voice. "Poor child! Do you not see how piteous are her eyes? Corisande, you are misleading her. Listen to me, Célie. It is all well now; our adorable Madame has consented to make me the most fortunate of men. And as for you—*voilà!*"

And before I could realise what had happened, Charlie was at my side, holding both my hands, and smiling down at me with a world of love in his blue eyes.

"Yes, at last," he whispered; "it has all come right, my brave Amaryllis. You have tried to escape from me, but it was no use; and now you shall *never* leave me, come what may."

"O, madame," I cried; "what does it all mean?"

It was easily explained.

A few jealous pangs caused by M. le Comte's artful little ruse, had shown Madame that, instead of being content with the "angel" Charlie, she had at last met with her master, and was honestly in love with the good little Frenchman who had wooed her in so novel a fashion.

With a generosity as unreserved as her previous selfishness, she acknowledged that she had acted with lamentable folly and vanity, and begged us to forgive and forget. Further, she hinted that she meant to provide handsomely for Charlie during her life-time, and to make him heir to all the Everril estates; which—as Charlie afterwards observed ungratefully—was no more nor less than her duty.

"And as for you, Celia," she ended, "I must thank you—it was you who showed me my folly. I have seen your note to Charlie, and he told me of your meeting in the wood. Good, loyal child. The best I can wish you," she added, smiling through her tears, "is that Charlie will be more amiable to you than he has been lately to the rest of us. He has been unbearably rude and cross and proud. My dear, can you ever forgive me?"

"Madame, dear madame!" I cried, almost foolish with happiness. "It is too good to be true."

"Not a bit of it," said Charlie, a little defiantly. "If I had not had *you*, Celia, I would have had no one. Did you all take me for a fool?"

Which speech contained the last reproach he ever made to Lady Corisande; and, perhaps, on the whole, it was not unmerited.

She had stepped beyond the boundaries of even an eccentric caprice, and the results might have been tragical. As it was, all turned into comedy. Her acknowledgment of her faults and errors was so frank and sincere that it was impossible to bear her ill-will, and we were all willing to let the story die a natural death and be buried in oblivion.

"All ends in smiles and joyousness," said eloquent M. le Comte, as we—two happy pair of lovers—parted, on the very warmest terms of friendship. "My pretty Celia has come to the sacrifice; but it is as a *willing* victim to be sacrificed on the Altar of Hymen."

KATHERINE CARR.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

HOW I AND MY SKETCHES WERE
NEARLY DROWNED.

BY N. CHEVALIER.

IT must be true that distance lends enchantment to the view ; else how can one explain that, across the hazy distance of some twenty years, we look even with complacency on an event that might have put an end to one's very existence ?

I can relate with comparative calmness now the narrow escape I had from a watery grave, when, after four months' hard work in the Australian wilds, I was returning home with the precious results of my labour strapped on my back in the fashion of a knapsack.

I was travelling in company with Dr. Neumayer, the present Director of the Observatory at Hamburg. He with his barometers, aneroids, theodolites, and other instruments for scientific observations ; I with my sketching apparatus, consisting of two boards forming a sort of portfolio, which contained nearly three dozen large oil sketches.

We were, as I have said, on our return journey, and I was anxious to visit Wilson's promontory ; a waste tract lying between Gipps Land and Point Nepeau.

For this purpose I made a détour in the required direction by means of a sailing boat which I chartered for the occasion. My Captain, Mariano by name, was an old salt hailing from the Bay of Naples. He was delighted to have this opportunity of airing his native language once more ; not having heard a syllable of it for many a long year. His entire crew consisted of a lad of twelve, a wide-awake chap who did honour even to that young and wide-awake nation, Australia.

How can I ever forget the delightful freedom of life I experienced in that trip ! Away from all civilisation and shops, gliding beneath a cloudless sky over the azure sea, which, whether rippled by a gentle breeze or disturbed by majestic waves, presented ever, in combination with the grand granitic coast, endless subjects for a Stanfield or a Hook.

If you want to be free for awhile from the cares of life, to work in your boat, or on the wild sea-shore ; if you would be content for your daily diet on the endless combinations produced by a skilful cook like old Mariano—chiefly composed of the results of his daily fishing ; if you would be satisfied to stretch your weary limbs on the

deck at night and sleep soundly until sunrise floods you in its glory ; if you would refresh your brush in nature's tints away from all academic conventionalities, then do as I did. Select the murkiest, foggiest, dimmallest autumn month of these changeable isles, and transport yourself by means of one of the sumptuous ocean steamers to the coast I visited, there to bask yourself to your heart's content in the brilliant sun of the southern hemisphere.

Laden, as I have before said, with the results of four months of steady work, I followed the track of my companion, who, with his pack-horses, was about a week's journey ahead of me.

At a sheep station belonging to Mr. John Black, at that time possessor of an extensive run on the Darwin River, I obtained the assistance of a young fellow who, for the consideration of half-a-crown, offered to accompany me a few miles down the banks of the stream, which I had to cross as best I could.

It should be mentioned that in those remote days the lucky owners of sheep runs and cattle stations, which extended over miles and miles of grassy plains or downs, had not the remotest desire to effect improvements themselves, or to allow the local government to do so.

Improved communications would only bring intruding neighbours, so that where bridges *might* have been erected for the public benefit, the river still had to be forded at the peril of your life and property.

The width of the Darwin River at the point where it is usually crossed is about the same as that of the Thames opposite Kew Gardens.

My horse, Sancho, had to carry not only my own not very light weight, but all my travelling kit besides, including wardrobe, painting materials, opossum rug, and the two boards containing the sketches. My guide pointed out the place where the river is usually crossed, calling my attention to two posts, one on either side, which marked the spot.

"Is this the crossing?" I asked somewhat anxiously.

"Yes, that's where the horses and cattle go over."

"Is it deep?"

"Well, as to the depth, it varies according to the tide and the weather. But, anyhow, you're all right now, and I must return to my work."

Pocketing his half-crown, he turned his nag homeward, smoking his cutty pipe with great satisfaction.

The reader may wonder why I did not enter upon the hazardous passage in the presence of my guide, but the beauty of the view caused me to pause. There was the bright beach and the calm ocean beyond ; the river mingling its sweet waters with the briny deep ; the banks green enough to delight the heart of a sheep-grower. Poor Sancho stood looking at me appealingly, as if to say : "Why not sketch this lovely spot, and let me have a good rest and a mouthful

of that succulent grass." If you have spent weeks of solitary travelling, with your horse as your only companion, he becomes so endeared to you by his valuable services and wonderful sagacity, that you cannot resist his mute appeal on such an occasion.

My own feelings moreover were quite in accord with those of Sancho, and I at once relieved him of his load: a favour which he acknowledged by immediately taking a roll in the soft, cool grass. What with my work and an occasional indulgence in the excellent sandwiches with which Miss Black had supplied my wallet, the time passed quickly by, and it was getting towards sunset before I again proceeded to saddle my steed.

Carefully arranging the whole gear and buckling my sketching apparatus across my shoulders, I mounted Sancho and cautiously descended the somewhat steep bank where the post indicated the way across.

I had not gone two yards, however, before I was convinced I had chosen the wrong spot. Sancho plunged into deep water, which came up above the saddle flaps. Nothing is more dangerous than altering a horse's course when in deep water, so I let him go a few yards lower down in the hope of finding a more shallow bottom. Old Sancho looked straight at the opposite bank as he always did when danger was ahead, so I again let him have his way.

Alas! a few yards from the bank there was no longer a footing, and we floated off into deep water.

Sancho swam, however, as if he had no weight whatever on his back, and in a few minutes the river was crossed, but not before we had been carried by the current considerably below the spot Sancho had evidently selected as a safe landing place.

Only those who have had the misfortune to be placed in a similar position can conceive the anxiety I felt. My poor beast was struggling with all his might to plant his fore legs upon the loamy bank. Huge masses of it would detach themselves at each fresh effort, and, falling into the water, were swept away by the current.

Baffled and exhausted, Sancho began to sink deeper into the water, in a few seconds we were some distance from the land, and I could only see the ears and the snorting nostrils of my poor horse, who sent up two columns of spray after the fashion of a whale.

There was no time to lose.

The critical moment had arrived, and slipping from my saddle, loaded as I was, I made a desperate effort to swim to shore. How I accomplished the task I do not know; but a few minutes after I seemed to be awakening from a kind of dream, and found myself lying flat on my back on terra firma, with my sketching boards safe under me.

My first anxiety was for my poor Sancho, and starting up, I saw to my intense satisfaction that he had gained the shore and was grazing near at hand on some luxuriant grass. The saddle was still upon his

back, but, alas, for the travelling kit ! It had been all swept away. There was I, however, safe and sound, and my precious sketches safe also.

As the nearest habitations were some miles away, I was delighted to see two canvas huts at no great distance off. On reaching them I found by the remains of a meal that the occupants must have just gone out.

My chief anxiety now was to ascertain the state of my sketches.

Opening the boards I spread the soaking pictures upon the level grass, an exhibition which seemed to be for the benefit of the innumerable grasshoppers, which, however, found no pasture upon the wet sheets and could do no damage to them.

Imagine, however, the astonishment of two stalwart young Britishers, the proprietors of the tents, who on their return found me busily engaged in getting the sketches into something like order. Luckily the work was not in water-colour, or it must have been damaged beyond repair.

I was most hospitably entertained by my new acquaintances, and, the next morning, provided with a long rope and a pole, and accompanied by one of my entertainers, I repaired to the spot where I and my sketches were nearly drowned. I waded in up to my arm-pits and probed the bottom of the river with the pole for a long time in the hope of recovering my kit ; but in vain.

I was informed by my new friends that the two posts which had misled me the day before, and which I considered indicated safety, were placed there by a paternal government to notify that the spot where they were planted was DANGEROUS.



THE MOUNTSEA MYSTERY.

BROWN and I had been at school together, and in due course we both started in the world—he in a bank, I in “the study and practice of the law.” I think I may conscientiously say that I stuck fairly well to my work and in due course struggled through the “Pass examination at the Institute.”

On the strength of this I felt more than justified in taking a holiday, and it struck me that Brown was the man with whom I should like to spend it, provided he could renounce the bank for a season. By a great stroke of luck, he managed to fit in his leave to suit mine, and everything was arranged, except the comparatively unimportant item of where we were to go. I really did not care whether I went inland or to the sea, and boldly said so when talking the matter over one day. Whereupon Brown, in that decisive way of his, said :

“I tell you what it is, Charteris : we’ll go down to Mountsea.”

Now Mountsea is a most excellent spot in many ways. Amongst other advantages it possesses the great charm of being very little known and, consequently, inexpensive.

“All right,” I replied, glad to have my mind made up for me. And in due course we found ourselves comfortably settled in the quaint little inn of Mountsea.

I can quite conceive the existence of people who would think the life down there “flat, stale and unprofitable.” With such I have no quarrel. Let them away to the crowded and conventional seaside resort. But give me a quiet, old-world spot, where the daily paper comes not until the day after to-morrow, and the attitude of Turkey or a meeting of the Emperors is not obtruded upon you with your early muffin.

There is no station at Mountsea. You and your goods and chattels (unless you prefer a walk) are brought from Orfield—the nearest point to which the railway goes—by a sort of glorified market cart, drawn by an interesting old relic once believed to have been of the horse tribe, but whose semblance to that noble genus has been well-nigh effaced by the hand of Time.

The driver, at the period I write of, was an equal curiosity. His age was undoubted, but the date of his birth was shrouded in mystery. People said something about the nineties ; but even if he knew himself he never told a soul.

Brown and I used to go down sometimes in the evening and smoke a pipe with old Vickers, and many a strange yarn of his early days did he spin for our especial benefit. He had been at the battle of Trafalgar ; and any reference to the great admiral was always

recognised by his slowly rising and taking off his hat, under whatever circumstances the name might be mentioned. He had lost an arm in the service, and had some small pension on which he lived in a cottage at the extreme outskirts of the little village. A widowed daughter lived with him, and assisted the domestic exchequer by taking in washing; so that altogether the old man was able to exist comfortably.

Well, time passed pleasantly enough down at Mountsea. We were both fond of swimming, and the walks in the neighbourhood were lovely; though, as may be supposed, the excitements were few, being limited to the drawing in of the nets in the afternoon and the arrival of the London papers. Nearly every evening there was held a solemn Tobacco Parliament in the bar-parlour of the "Sea Horse," where we were staying, and the events of the past two or three days were discussed with, occasionally, no little warmth—for party feeling ran high, and the affairs of nations troubled the local mind considerably.

But there was yet another attraction at Mountsea. The Vicar, Mr. Carruthers, was a connection of Brown's. He was of a quiet and retiring disposition, and since his wife's death, some years before, had lived in almost absolute seclusion with his only daughter, Dora.

Both Mr. Carruthers and his daughter were most kind and hospitable. Visitors were rare in those parts, which may, to some extent, account for the warmth of our reception. We were at their house a good deal, and met there with such society as the little village afforded.

Mr. Carruthers' only sister, an aged and somewhat eccentric lady, lived, with an old housekeeper as her only servant and companion, at a large, old-fashioned house, known as "The Laurels," standing by itself rather away from the village in the midst of a regular wilderness of garden. Old Mrs. Jevons never left the house, but either her brother or her niece spent an hour or two with her every day. Mrs. Corfe, her housekeeper, was the widow of a coastguardsmen, and had lived with her mistress for a very long time. She was a woman of about fifty years of age, and lived as retired a life as Mrs. Jevons herself. She was a tall, thin, gaunt individual of a somewhat austere countenance, with grey hair. She had a rather anxious look about her at times, and this was attributed to the fact that her only son, Simeon, was a wild ne'er-do-well, who had run away to sea when quite a boy. He often visited Mountsea and spent all his time whilst there in lounging about the village, generally in the region of the "Sea Horse." It was rumoured among the gossippers that he was in some way connected with a band of smugglers, who were occasionally heard of in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Jevons had no other relatives excepting a rackets young nephew, supposed to be her prospective heir.

Apart from his extravagant habits, or perhaps on account of them

—for he was generous with his money, when he had any—he was very popular in the village, but he never stayed with his aunt. He appeared in a meteoric manner from time to time, stayed two or three days at the “Sea Horse,” and then disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived. Presumably his visits were not made from pure affection; for, though he always spoke very highly of his aunt, we shrewdly suspected that his regard for her and desire to see her were tempered with more sordid considerations, judging from the remarks he made when chatting over a pipe one evening with Brown and myself.

Indeed, we gathered that he and his aunt had had high words on the subject of his reckless expenditure that very day, though their differences were not of so serious a nature as, in his opinion, to imperil his prospects in that quarter. I did not associate so much with him as Brown did, for whenever I could obtain a reasonable pretext (and, I fear, often when I could not) I used to run up to the Vicarage; for the charm of Miss Carruthers’ society was not to be resisted. I was passionately fond of music, and Miss Carruthers had an exquisite voice; one of those naturally sympathetic voices which to me are far sweeter than those of your most cultivated artificial singers.

I could conceive no greater pleasure than to sit in the half-light of that low, old-fashioned room, listening, spell-bound, to that sweet voice which thrilled me as no music ever did before or has since.

My classical lore, never extensive, had become very rusty; but Mr. Carruthers had devoted a great part of his leisure to literature; more particularly to Latin; and poor as my abilities were, it seemed to gratify him to chat over his pet subject with someone who, like myself, knew even a little about it. I did not, strange though it may seem, realise that I was gradually but surely falling in love with Miss Carruthers. I tried in a feeble way to persuade myself that it was mainly to enjoy the intellectual pleasure of Mr. Carruthers’ society and the charms of music that I went so often to the Vicarage.

One day, Brown and I were returning, late in the afternoon, from a fishing excursion when, just at the outskirts of the village, we saw Charlie Harcourt, Mrs. Jevons’ nephew, talking to old Vickers, whom he left directly he caught sight of us.

As he came toward us I was struck by his haggard and careworn look, and remarked upon it.

“Yes,” said he, “I have had a good deal of worry lately. Money, as usual, is scarce. In fact, I’m in a dilemma just now and don’t see my way out of it.”

I did not care to question him as to his private affairs, thinking that if he wished to tell us anything or ask our advice, he would do so. For though Harcourt was always friendly, he was not as a rule communicative as to the nature of his difficulties, and confined himself generally to references to their existence.

We walked along in silence for some time, and then Harcourt suddenly broke out:

"I don't know that you fellows can help me, but I think you would, if you had it in your power. I've been a fool, but it's not entirely my fault. Some months since, I was at a friend's chambers in town one evening, and we were playing cards in a modest way. It was getting rather late, and Harman, our host, said: 'Well, you men, I'm thinking of turning in as I have a case on early tomorrow. But don't give up on my account—Harcourt will look after you.' Just as he was leaving the room, a knock came to the door and we heard him say: 'Desanges! who ever thought of seeing you! Come in and let me have a look at you. Where have you been hiding yourself all these months?' Harman thereupon ushered in a tall, dark, rather handsome man, looking like a foreigner, but who spoke English without a trace of accent, and introduced him to the party. 'Perhaps you'd like to join in?' said Harman, and the visitor assented. 'Under the circumstances,' he added, 'I must not tear myself away.' We resumed our game, finally leaving somewhere in the small hours. I found my way lay in the same direction as Desanges, so we strolled along together. He seemed to have taken rather a fancy to me and we separated with a promise on my part that I would come and see him. I am sorry that I ever did so; for though personally I have always liked him, my present embarrassments are owing to that unfortunate introduction. I saw a good deal of Desanges and, at his instance, foolishly allowed myself to be put up for his club, where play was very high. I never was a gambler, but I liked cards and used to be there night after night. Desanges himself rarely played high, nor did I at first: but thinking to recoup myself for some trifling losses, I plunged a little, and so went from bad to worse, until I am now heavily in debt, with no earthly prospect of being able to pay my I O U's—to say nothing of my bills—excepting from my aunt. She doesn't know the cause of my difficulties, but I have asked her again and again for money, until she told me, when I last made an appeal to her, that it must be a final one and that she neither could nor would afford me any further assistance. This was only what I might have expected, but my necessities compel me, and I am come to make a last attempt, for I am driven to desperation. If she won't help me, there is only one alternative before me; for I cannot go on as I am."

We tried to cheer him, but it was of little use, and as he left us he said "Well, I daresay the next time we meet it will be at my own inquest, if I can't manage to tide over this difficulty. If I do, I swear I'll never touch a card again."

From what Harcourt told us, it did not seem as though things were so serious as he imagined, for his more pressing debts only amounted to some two or three hundred pounds. Still he appeared to have exhausted every other source, for neither Brown nor myself had either the means or the inclination to advance him the money.

Knowing how fond his aunt was of him, we concluded he was

taking too gloomy a view of the position, and made sure that he would be able to overcome her determination, as this was to be positively the last time he meant to trouble her. I think he had quite determined to settle down to work at his profession—that of an engineer—at which he was really clever; for his experiences of the last few months had been such as to turn him against cards for ever.

So we thought no more about the matter, and after dinner strolled down to the beach, where we sat and smoked, watching the broad track of silver moonlight stretching away to the horizon, and the bright beams from the lighthouse, which we could just discern far along the coast, until I, at least, felt myself becoming quite sentimental.

However, it presently became rather prosaically chilly, so we turned towards home.

As we drew near to the "Sea Horse," we saw quite an imposing crowd at the door, a most unusual sight at that hour of the evening. There was evidently some cause of excitement afoot, and we were not long in learning the facts.

Stated briefly, though, as may be supposed, there was a good deal of conflicting evidence about the details, some person or persons had entered Mrs. Jevons' house, and had made off with a considerable sum of money, leaving the old lady in a very dangerous condition. She had been found by her housekeeper, lying on her sitting-room floor with a very severe wound in the head and perfectly unconscious. Her desk, which was known to have contained a large sum in notes, had been burst open and the whole of the money had been abstracted.

Brown and I looked at each other and were silent. I don't think either of us accused Harcourt of having committed such an outrage; but, knowing what we did, the thought, not unnaturally, passed simultaneously through our minds, and we hastened at once to make further enquiries.

We knew the doctor slightly, having met him at Mr. Carruthers' house two or three times, and on our way to the vicarage we encountered him. He confirmed the story we had heard, and informed us that though he had slight hopes of Mrs. Jevons' recovery, it would be some time before she would be able to speak of what had occurred. In fact, he feared, from the nature of the injury, that it might be months, for an attack of brain fever was imminent.

As I have explained, the only other occupant of the house was Mrs. Corfe, the old housekeeper, and she, from what we could gather, was in her own room, quite away from the scene of the crime at the time it must have happened. The robber, or robbers, doubtless effected their entry by the back of the house, through a French window leading on to the lawn, close to which it was Mrs. Jevons' custom to sit in the long summer evenings. The night being very warm, she had presumably left the window open; and the generally accepted theory was that she had been sitting, as usual, in her arm-

chair when the thieves arrived, and they, in order to avoid being disturbed, had taken the rough and ready way of knocking the poor old lady on the head.

The crime, so it was reported, had been discovered by Mrs. Corfe going into the room, as was her habit, to enquire if her mistress required anything before going to bed. Immediately upon the discovery of the outrage the police had, of course, been sent for, and after a preliminary survey of the premises, a detective from Scotland Yard was telegraphed for: the local talent being considered scarcely equal to so important an enquiry.

By the early train next morning, Mr. Joseph Winter of the Metropolitan Police Force arrived.

Now this gentleman was by no means an ordinary individual. No one would have taken him for a member of his distinguished profession, for he, so far as appearances went, in no respect carried out the traditions of that branch of the force of which he was so bright an ornament. He was rather below the average height, and with his ruddy colour and jovial manner looked far more like a well-to-do farmer than a detective. But there the resemblance ceased. For when you looked more closely at him, there was evident a quiet confidence in his own powers; and you felt, almost indescribably, that here was a man of keen observation of human nature, and one who could read your very thoughts almost before they took shape in your own mind.

On his arrival, he proceeded to the "Sea Horse," where he had a hasty meal, during which he chatted with the landlord—a very communicative man—whose endeavours to find out who his guest was were wholly unsuccessful. After many fruitless attempts, the worthy host broke out at length:

"But may be you'll be down here for the fishing, sir? There's a lot of gentlemen come to stop at this house for that; and though I says it, I know every inch of the neighbourhood, and can tell you the best streams better than anybody. Why, there was a gentleman staying here only last week as took a three-and-half-pound trout out of Squire Benham's lower stream; and they do say as there's a fish there as scales nigh ten pounds only a-waitin' for some one to offer him a fly to his liking."

"Fishing's all very well for those with time and opportunity, but I'm a busy man just now, Mr. Landlord, and can't manage it. Still, if you'll have a nice half-pounder for my breakfast to-morrow, I won't say but what I'll undertake to make it look pretty foolish before I've done with it."

"Well, sir, I'll see what I can do for you. There's a sight of fish in poor Mrs. Jevons' ground. But there—the place is in such an upset after last night."

"Why, what's happened there?" enquired Mr. Winter.

"Law bless me, sir!—But of course you couldn't know, though.

Why, they found the old lady lying on her own sitting-room floor, more than half dead, and thousands of pounds in bank notes taken out of her desk."

"Well, and do they know or suspect who's done it?"

"No, sir; no. The police down here don't seem to have many ideas about it; and they've been and shut up the rooms, so they say, a-waitin' for a detective from London. But, you know, he won't get here till to-morrow, I don't expect, and by that time the thieves 'll have got off, if they haven't already. Now, between me and you, sir, there was a young man down here yesterday, as is the nephew of old Mrs. Jevons, and he was awfully hard up, as I knows myself, and I have heard it said as how as he aint wholly unconnected with this business—but there aint no proof whatsoever against him as I knows of."

"And is he here now?" asked Mr. Winter, finishing his last mouthful.

"No, sir; no. Nobody's seen anything of him since about nine o'clock last night."

"Well, good morning, landlord. I've got some things to see to in the village, so I must be off."

With these words Mr. Winter rose, and putting on his hat started off for the Laurels. When he arrived, there were still a good many loiterers trying to get a glimpse of the premises, which were, however, jealously guarded by the police. He soon obtained an entrance, and proceeded to inspect the apartment in which the outrage had been committed. This had been left exactly as it had been found, and the policeman in charge explained to Mr. Winter the way in which Mrs. Jevons had been discovered.

"Well, now," said Winter, "I must examine the place thoroughly. First, let us look outside the window. You say that this was found open?"

"Just so; and we can see slight marks of a man's foot outside, although the ground is rather hard."

"Very good," said Winter, after he had examined the almost imperceptible footprints; "now let us look inside again. The desk was found like this, burst open, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and this knife we found on the floor was evidently used to do it with, as it fits these marks exactly."

Mr. Winter quietly put the knife in his pocket.

"Now," said he, "let us look at the desk. Here are some account books. Ha! what is this? Here is an entry showing that she must have had nearly £1,700 in the desk, for the receipt of the amount is only dated the day before yesterday, unless she had sent it over to the bank at Orfield, which we can easily ascertain. However, there is nothing more of any importance in that. H'm! here is a pocket-book. Let's look through this. Well," said he, after glancing into it and slipping it into his pocket, "we'll look through that presently."

Anyone acquainted with Winter's method of procedure would have readily inferred that he had seen something of unusual significance in this pocket-book.

"Come," said he, suddenly turning the subject, "with what implement do you suppose the blow was struck?"

"There is the difficulty," said Jones, the policeman. "So far as we have seen, there is nothing in the room with which it can have been done."

"Well, and what does the doctor say about the wound?"

"I have not heard yet."

"Never mind," said Winter. "Let's see what else is to be found."

There were several drawers and cupboards open, and their contents scattered about, though nothing else seemed to have been taken; for some silver spoons in one of the sideboard drawers had been left; so that it was clear that the object of the robbers had been to obtain ready money. When Winter had taken notes of everything they had found, they were leaving the room, when they encountered the doctor coming down the stairs.

"Can you spare me a moment, sir?" asked the detective. "My name is Winter, and I have just come down from Scotland Yard to investigate this business."

"Certainly," replied the doctor. "Shall we go in here?" indicating the door of the dining-room. When they had entered, Winter began:

"Now, sir, may I ask if you can form any opinion as to how the blow was struck?"

"As far as I can see, it must have been inflicted with some blunt weapon, most likely a stick, or the butt end of a revolver. The blow must have been repeated, for there are three distinct wounds, either of which would have been sufficient to cause insensibility; and although I do not think her life is in immediate danger, the shock to a lady of that age—she is nearly eighty—has been very serious. I think that it would be injurious, and possibly fatal, to question her at present. She is just conscious of what is going on, but has not spoken yet, and I am afraid that the slightest excitement might produce a fatal result."

The interview ended and Winter started off for the village telegraph office. On his way back, he entered the grounds of the Laurels through the shrubbery at the bottom of the garden just as I had called to inquire how Mrs. Jevons was progressing. Brown, unfortunately, had been obliged to return to town that morning, much against his inclination, but he begged me to keep him informed of all the events which were taking place at Mountsea.

As I was turning to go down the steps, Winter made his appearance, and although I had not seen him before, I at once, knowing that a detective had arrived, concluded that it was he.

My curiosity was aroused by observing that he carried a peculiar

stick in his hand, one which belonged to Harcourt, and which I had frequently noticed in his possession. I, perhaps rather abruptly, addressed him.

"Excuse me, sir, but may I ask where you found that stick? I believe it belongs to a friend of mine."

"Indeed," said he. "It seems rather too valuable to be lying about in a shrubbery. I should advise your friend to take more care of it in future. Would you mind telling me his name?"

"Not at all. Charles Harcourt. He is a nephew of Mrs. Jevons', and though I am not very intimate with him, I have met him pretty frequently in the last few weeks. By-the-bye, am I right in assuming that you are from Scotland Yard?"

"Quite right, sir. I suppose you are a friend of the family and may be able to render some assistance in clearing up this mystery."

"My name is Arthur Charteris," I replied. "I know Mrs. Jevons slightly, and need not add that my services, such as they are, are at your disposal."

"Thank you, sir," returned he. "Would you mind telling me when and where you last saw this Mr. Harcourt, and under what circumstances?"

I thereupon gave him an account of the conversation which Brown and I had had with Harcourt the previous evening, to which he listened very attentively, occasionally putting a pertinent question.

"Well," said I, when I had finished, "you don't think him capable of such a crime, surely?"

"I don't know yet what to think, my dear sir, but there is a good deal in what I have heard to make me very anxious to see this young man. Do you know where he is?"

"Nothing, so far as I know, has been seen or heard of him since he left me last night; but I've no doubt he went back to town by the night mail, after leaving this house, for I know he wished to return as soon as possible. Poor fellow! How this terrible news will upset him."

"I expect it will," said Winter sententiously. "Do you see the knot of this stick?" handing it to me as he spoke.

I started, for it bore a dark red stain. Looking full at Winter, I saw what was passing through his mind.

"Blood," said he. "There's not a doubt about it, and I don't think we need search very far to find out whose it is. The blow, there can be little doubt, was struck with this stick. Will you walk down with me to the doctor's? He will settle the point at once."

"By all means," said I; and we soon found ourselves in his surgery. He confirmed our suspicions, and Winter and I returned to the inn.

"What are you going to do next?" I inquired. "Wire off a description of Harcourt to Scotland Yard, I suppose?"

"Yes, if I knew he was in London. I think you said you didn't know his address?"

"Unfortunately I don't, though I can of course obtain it from the Vicar. But if he went up by the night mail, which is pretty certain, if he went at all, old Vickers must have driven him over to Orfield. I'll go over and see him at once."

"Very well," returned Winter; "we'll go on and interview him after leaving the telegraph office."

We found old Vickers diligently hoeing potatoes in his little strip of garden, and at once learnt from him that, as we had expected, he had driven Harcourt across to the station late the night before. On further inquiry we elicited the information that he had been the only passenger from Orfield, and had paid the old man handsomely for his trouble. There was nothing more to be learnt from him, except that Harcourt had been very anxious to be in time for the train, and that he had joined old Vickers at the cross roads just beyond the Laurels in a state of great agitation. As we were returning to the "Sea Horse" we were met by the telegraph boy, who handed Winter a telegram, which he hastily opened.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "this is better than I had anticipated."

"Well, but they cannot have had time to arrest Harcourt yet?" I said.

"No; but do you know that in searching Mrs. Jevons' desk this morning, I came across this note-book," producing one from his pocket, "which contains a memorandum of the numbers of the notes, paid to her only the day before yesterday by a farmer in the neighbourhood, in discharge of a mortgage. I telegraphed at once to stop the notes, and this message is to say that two of them for £100 each have been presented in London this morning."

"Do they know who presented them?"

"The telegram does not say, but I expect I shall hear again in the course of the day."

There was nothing further to be done now, so I turned my steps to the Vicarage, while Winter returned to the inn for some lunch.

At the Vicarage I found them much upset by last night's occurrences, as might be expected. Miss Carruthers was very indignant that any shadow of suspicion should have fallen on Harcourt. "For," said she, "he may be a little wild and thoughtless, and I know he is rather extravagant in his habits, but he could never have sunk to the level of a crime to obtain money."

I hastened to reassure her, adding that though some said that Harcourt was in some way connected with the outrage, I could see absolutely no real proof against him. Still, as Mr. Carruthers said, to an outsider the circumstances were suspicious. I took tea with them, and after a stroll round the garden, left them, promising to let them know immediately, should any fresh details come to light. On my return to the inn I found Winter standing at the door.

"Shall we take a stroll along the cliffs?" he asked. "I want a talk with you, and you may be able to give me some suggestions."

I felt flattered at being taken into his confidence, and we walked away together.

As soon as we were quite clear of the village Winter began :

"While you have been away I have been up to the Laurels, and have seen Mrs. Corfe. Now between you and me there was something not quite straightforward about her manner when I questioned her, and I have an idea that she knows more about this business than she pretends to. She says that at about a quarter past seven, Harcourt called at the house, and went into Mrs. Jevons' sitting-room. She did not see him leave, as she was in her own room at the top of the house, and neither heard nor saw anything till about a quarter to ten, when she went into the sitting-room and found her mistress on the floor. I don't half like her manner, and we must watch her carefully. She cannot be interested in screening Harcourt, for from what I gather he was never a favourite of hers. Could she have been present when ——"

Suddenly we looked at each other. The same thought occurred to us both at the same moment.

"Mrs. Corfe must have known that the money was in the house. Could *she* have done it? And yet here we have the presentation of these two notes this morning. There is something I can't quite fathom here yet. Well, let us get back; perhaps I shall find another telegram waiting for me."

As he had anticipated, there was one saying that the authorities had communicated with the customer, to whose account at the bank the notes had been paid, and found that he had received them from Harcourt, but they had hitherto been unable to discover the latter's whereabouts.

This threw an altogether different light on the matter; and reluctant as I was to believe Harcourt guilty, I felt that things now looked very black indeed for him. However, nothing further could be done that night, and as I didn't wish to be inconveniently questioned at the Vicarage, I remained at the inn.

Next morning's post confirmed the two telegrams, and added that they were on the scent and hoped to arrest Harcourt in the course of the day. In fact, another telegram arrived just after, stating that they had found him and that he would be brought down to Orfield by the mid-day train.

Meanwhile, Winter's movements were most mysterious. He disappeared immediately after he had received the telegram, and I saw nothing further of him that day.

I am afraid that my desire to assist in the discovery of the authors of the outrage was not my only inducement to remain at Mountsea after Brown had left. The fact was I was determined to know the best or the worst with regard to Miss Carruthers. I had some letters to write during the morning and after lunch, as it was too early to go down to the Vicarage, I started off for a ramble along the cliffs. I

had not gone far when I saw in the distance a figure which seemed to me to bear a strong resemblance to that of Mr. Joseph Winter. But whoever it was, he disappeared before I could come up with him, and I continued my walk in silence, pondering over the late strange events and trying to make up my mind to risk the fatal question.

On my return to the village, I took heart of grace and went up to the Vicarage, hoping for the best, but prepared for the worst. It was, perhaps, scarcely a fitting opportunity considering everything : but I thought I would risk it, as I had to return to town very shortly : and if poor Mrs. Jevons were to succumb to her injuries, as I feared, I might have to postpone matters indefinitely.

Why should I attempt to describe what has so often been told before, and will be again ? The details, of course, vary in every case, but the general tenour of the proceedings is much the same. I found both Mr. and Miss Carruthers at home, but the Vicar begged me to excuse him for half an hour, as he had some parish business to attend to. So I thoughtfully allowed him to retire to the congenial atmosphere of his study, with scarcely a feeling of regret.

I fancy Dora had some instinctive notion of what was coming, for she did not appear utterly astonished when I proceeded to unbar the floodgates of my eloquence. I think the astonishment was rather on my side, at the amount I had to say and the comparative ease with which I said it. The ordeal was soon over ; and, such is human nature, I wondered at my diffidence, and thought I would go through all the past weeks of doubt and anxiety ten times over, only to hear Dora tell me once again that she loved me. I could not wait until the Vicar's return, so went and bearded the lion in his den. He received me most kindly, and I found, to my relief, that my proposal was one for which he was not wholly unprepared.

"I have not entirely lost my powers of perception," said he, with a kindly smile, "though I have spent most of my life in a country vicarage."

He gave his consent at once ; and happily, having frequently talked over and consulted with him as to my position and prospects, I had no need to enter into prosaic details of ways and means.

I dined at the Vicarage that evening, and as it was getting dusk, Dora and I walked round the garden, building "castles in Spain," and indulging in all sorts of speculations about the future.

Whilst we were in the garden, a messenger arrived from the Laurels, saying that the doctor had been again, and had pronounced the old lady much worse. In fact, he now entertained no hopes of her recovery.

Mr. Carruthers and Dora immediately started to see her, and I went back to the inn. There I found a note from Winter, saying that he had gone over to Orfield to interview Harcourt, and would not be back that night ; and if any telegram came for him, he begged me

to open it, and let him know at once should it be anything of importance. With this responsibility on my shoulders, I felt that I could not stay far away, so I remained at the inn, reading.

At about half-past nine I received a message from Dora at the Laurels, saying that Mrs. Jevons had breathed her last about an hour ago, and that she (Dora) had "something dreadful" to tell me. Would I come up to the Laurels at once? To this request I could only accede, and hurried thither in great anxiety.

I found her in tears, and she at once drew me into the dining-room, and shut the door.

"Oh, Arthur!" she exclaimed, "do you know what my aunt's last words were?"

Of course I did not.

"Just before her death," she continued, "she recovered complete consciousness for a moment, and there, in the presence of my father, the doctor and Mrs. Corfe she murmured, 'Tell Charlie I forgive him.' Oh! isn't it dreadful!" and she burst out crying again.

I did my best to comfort her, and tried to assure her that Mrs. Jevons' words probably had no reference to the crime; but in my heart I could not help feeling that this was only an additional link in the chain which was binding poor Harcourt. I think Dora must have fully realised this, for, when we parted for the night, she was sadder than ever.

Next morning, Winter put in an appearance at the early hour of six, and told me that the Carrutherses, Mrs. Corfe, old Vickers and myself would have to attend at the Orfield police station at eleven o'clock that morning. I told him of Mrs. Jevons' death, and of her dying words, and to my great relief found that he did not consider it absolutely necessary that Dora should go over to Orfield. I hastened to the Vicarage, but they were not up yet; so I left a note for Mr. Carruthers, begging him to bring Mrs. Corfe over to Orfield in old Vickers' cart, for I meant to walk with Winter.

After breakfast, the detective said he must see Mrs. Corfe for a few minutes, as he had some questions to ask her. So he walked up to the Laurels, and, on his return, we both started for Orfield.

I am not going to enter into the details of the magisterial inquiry which was held that morning. Had not the law been my own profession, perhaps I might have delighted in wearying you with technical points, and giving you the proceedings verbatim. But as it is, I will content myself with saying that the combined evidence of Mrs. Corfe (who, of course, must needs drag in poor Mrs. Jevons' dying words), old Vickers, the detective and my unwilling self—every jot of which told against poor Harcourt—was more than sufficient to authorise the magistrates in committing the prisoner for trial at the assizes, which were to be held in a fortnight's time.

It was a sad evening at Mountsea, as may well be supposed. The two dreadful calamities—her aunt's death and her cousin's com-

mittal—well nigh overwhelmed poor Dora. I remained with her for a day or two till the funeral should take place. We were a mournful party, for I could now feel much more the death of the old lady, owing to her being Dora's aunt.

The contents of the will surprised us all. Mrs. Jevons was much wealthier than had been supposed, and, with the exception of a small legacy to Mrs. Corfe, she left the whole of her property to be equally divided between her nephew, Charles Harcourt, and her niece, Dora Carruthers.

I returned to town the day after the funeral, and resumed my usual occupation; and so a week passed slowly by.

During that week I had twice called at Scotland Yard, and inquired for Winter. On the first occasion I was told he was at Portsmouth, and on the second at Dover. My third attempt was on the day before Harcourt's trial was to come off, and this time I found him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, when he caught sight of me. "You're the very man I wanted. No time for explanations now. Go and pack your bag at once, and meet me at Waterloo at 4.23."

"Well, but what am I to ——"

"Go at once, I tell you, and don't waste time."

I knew that I should have to attend at the Levenshire County Assizes on the following day; so without further parley, I jumped into a cab to do as I was bid. It was already half-past three, and I had no time to spare; but I just reached Waterloo in time, and Winter and I found ourselves alone in a carriage. When we had got clear of London, he unbosomed himself as follows:

"From the very first," he began, "I felt quite sure that Harcourt was innocent; for, if he had committed the crime, he wouldn't have thrown his stick away into the shrubbery, as it was a peculiar one, and would at once be recognised. How it got there I will presently explain to you. Then he knew the ways of the house, more or less, and would not have ransacked all those drawers and cupboards for nothing, but would have been content with the cash. Nor, if he had stolen the notes, would he have been so utterly foolish as to put them into circulation so soon, and in the way almost certain to lead to detection. But my most conclusive point was a knife which was found on the floor, and with which the desk was forced open. It was a knife such as sailors always carry, and I didn't suppose for a moment that it belonged to Harcourt. You will see where this came from, all in good time. You may remember that two days after the murder I disappeared all day long. Well, that knife had given me an idea. I walked along the cliff as far as the coastguard's, and questioned him. As I had expected, he had seen a small lugger waiting about off the coast in a suspicious manner, from eight to ten o'clock on the night of the murder.

"Do you know whose it was?" I asked him.

"'Well, no, not exactly ; but I guessed young Corfe wasn't so far off.'

"'Young Corfe ! Who's he ?'

"'Oh, him ? He's round here now and again, bringing brandy ashore, I'll warrant. He's Mrs. Corfe's son, up at the Laurels yonder.'

"Well, I got more out of the coastguard than I expected, and this last statement of his opened my eyes a good deal. From what I afterwards gathered from the coastguard, I made my way down the side of a ravine and found a cleft in the rock, which he had described to me. I scrambled in with some difficulty. It was a cave, evidently of considerable extent, as I could see even in the dim light. I proceeded for some distance with the aid of a box of matches, and presently I saw a faint glimmer of daylight far ahead. To my astonishment when I reached this point, the cave debouched into what looked like a well ; and on examining it I found that it actually was an old well, and if you care to go there and climb up you will, perhaps, be surprised to find yourself in a remote corner of Mrs. Jevons' garden. If I had any doubt now, it was removed when, on the way out, I picked up on the floor of the cave a white silk handkerchief. It had evidently been used to bandage up somebody's arm or leg and it was stained with blood. In the corner were the initials H. J.—Harriett Jevons. Although I questioned Mrs. Corfe most closely, she asserted most positively that she hadn't seen her son lately and didn't know where he was. Still I now had something to go on. I got a description of the lugger from the coastguard and of young Corfe from several people. I also learnt that he *had* been seen in the village, by one person at least, on the night of the murder. These descriptions I telegraphed off to most of the seaport towns along the South Coast. The result was that in a couple of days' time I had a telegram from Portsmouth saying that such a boat had arrived and such a man was on board. I went down at once, but the boat had slipped away the night before. One of the bank-notes, though, was presented in Portsmouth that day, and we traced it to a man answering to Corfe's description. The next I heard of him was at Dover, and I hurried thither accordingly. This time fortune favoured me, and we captured him in a public house of no very reputable character. To my astonishment he confessed to the robbery, and though I showed him that we had a complete chain of evidence against him, I kept from him Mrs. Jevons' death and the fact that he would be charged with murder. It seems that he wanted money ; and learning, when he went to see his mother at Mountsea, that Mrs. Jevons had a large amount in bank-notes in her house, he planned the robbery without any intention of doing bodily harm to the old lady. On his entering the sitting-room, however, she, in her fright, proceeded to scream to such an extent that, fearful of being disturbed, he had snatched up a stick—Harcourt's, you know—which was lying on a chair close by, and administered the three blows on Mrs. Jevons'

head, which proved fatal to her. Mrs. Corfe, hearing the screams, hurried down stairs, opened the door and entered the room just in time to see her son strike Mrs. Jevons to the ground. He exchanged some angry words with her, but she could do nothing to restrain him, and after rifling the drawers and cupboards, he espied the desk lying on the table, which he immediately proceeded to force open, in doing which he cut his hand. He felt confident that his mother would not reveal the fact that her own son was the author of the outrage, and so proceeded to escape by means of the well. With regard to Harcourt, it seems that his appeal for money was listened to, for he says his aunt gave him bank-notes for five hundred pounds, after upbraiding him for his extravagance, and on his vowing that this should be the very last time that he would ever come to her for money. By accident he left his stick behind, and then hurried off to meet old Vickers and drive over to Orfield. So now I think we have completed the job, and I expect we shall have very little trouble in getting Harcourt acquitted."

I had listened in astonishment to Winter's narrative, and was congratulating him on the success of his manoeuvres, when the train drew up at Orfield. Here Winter remained, and I drove over to Mountsea and hurried up to the Vicarage. They were surprised to see me, and intensely gratified at the news I brought of the arrest of the real murderer.

I stopped at the "Sea Horse" that night, and on the morrow we all drove over to Orfield, and took the train for Oxiter, the county town, where the assizes were to be held.

The result of the trial was as we expected.

Harcourt was acquitted, but it was a severe lesson to him; *he* said a punishment which he well deserved. Mr. Simeon Corfe was afterwards tried on the charge of manslaughter, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

I have little more to add.

The following spring, Dora Carruthers became Dora Charteris, and we are now comfortably settled in the neighbourhood of London. Mr. Carruthers, feeling that he was advancing in life, resigned his living at Mountsea and came to reside with us. Mrs. Corfe disappeared from the neighbourhood, and has not since been heard of. Brown comes to dine with us occasionally. He, too, is married and lives not far off. Charlie Harcourt is still a bachelor, though a reformed one. He seems to prefer a single life, and has, so far as I know, rigidly kept his vow, for he will never take even a hand at whist when he comes to see us. I see Mr. Winter now and again. He still shines in his profession, and has unravelled several far more complicated cases than the "Mountsea Mystery."

SALT WORKING AND SALT SUPERSTITIONS.

BY ALEXANDER H. JAPP, LL.D., F.R.S.E.

A FEW more words are necessary before concluding our remarks on salt.

The following is a very simple and general description of the process followed in obtaining salt at the Cheshire mines.

First, the blasting of the mine. A shot hole is drilled with an arrow-headed rod of iron some eight feet in length. The hole is cleared of every particle of dust and then charged with several ounces of coarse powder, some salt being laid on the top. A straw filled with fine powder is then placed in the shot-hole, and the charge is fired with a piece of cotton-wick.

In a second or two the charge explodes, and many tons of solid rock-salt are blown outward to a short distance.

These fragments are then collected, placed in baskets and pushed on rails to the mouth of the pit. They are then raised by steam power.

Two qualities of salt result. One called Prussian rock, from its being largely exported to the shores of the Baltic; the other coarse, used chiefly for agricultural purposes. Much of this is sent to Australia, where the land in large areas in some quarters demands its application.

In Cheshire there are constant brine-springs in working, as well as rock-salt mining. To raise the brine various methods are adopted. Not very many years ago, it was raised by human labour: men, half-naked, descending to the pit by stairs, and drawing up the water in leathern buckets. Water-wheels, windmills and horse-power took their place; and these, in their turn, have given place completely to steam.

The brine is pumped up through a series of iron tubes screwed together, and called *trees*. It is then carried across the yard in a wooden trough, fixed to the tops of the *trees*, and emptied into a vast cistern, or reservoir. Here, while it remains unagitated, an iron-grey scum forms on the top, which is filled with bubbles. A quantity of rock-salt is kept in the reservoirs, to ensure the complete saturation of the brine.

This salt-water is now ready for the process of manufacture into table-salt by means of artificial evaporation.

The brine is made to flow through pipes into the evaporating pans. These are large square or circular vessels, made of wrought iron, and supported on brick furnaces, which extend far beneath the pans. Some of these pans are sixty feet long and forty feet wide,

while others are considerably larger even than that. Over furnace and pan is a wooden shed, to keep out all cold air.

The pans being filled with brine, the fires are lighted, and the work of evaporation begins.

After a short lapse of time, a man takes his place on a platform at the edge of the pan. His business is that of "raking." He throws out constantly into the midst of the boiling fluid a long iron rake, with which he draws to the surface of the fluid masses a fine white substance, which had settled at the bottom.

As soon as the brine begins to boil, the salt rises to the surface in a kind of scum, and then, after a short time, it sinks slowly to the bottom, when it is drawn together and lifted out with a large perforated "skimmer," all the brine escaping through the holes as it is being lifted.

The salt is then placed in little wooden tubs, also bored with holes, set round in spaces by the side of the pan.

Having filled a certain number of these tubs, the man *hops*, or smooths, the salt carefully over, and sets the batch on a kind of hurdle, to be conveyed to the drying-room—a long, low chamber, highly heated by flues extending from the furnace. The spaces between the flues are called "ditches," really drains to carry off the water from the tubs. After a certain exposure here the salt becomes thoroughly solid; then it is removed in the oblong blocks in which it is sold.

The production of the different kinds of salt is determined by the degree of heat to which the brine is exposed, and the time thus allowed for the process of detachment from other salts and for crystallisation.

The process we have more particularly described above is that of "lump salt." What is called "Patent Butter Salt"—the finest of all—is made in circular pans, completely covered over; the salt, as it settles at the bottom, being "raked" by a mechanical process of leverage into what is called a "hopper," a kind of square tub, placed at the side of the pan.

"Common salt" is made in pans, which are never heated to the boiling point. "Rough salt" is made from brine just warmed through, and no more. The pans in this case are only cleared about once a week; and the salt, being very coarse in the grain, is much in demand for salting herrings and such things. "Fishery salt" is coarser still: it is only drawn once a fortnight or so, with grains sometimes as much as half-an-inch long. This is entirely used for salting fish. To aid in purifying the salt, a pinch of soft soap or glue is generally thrown into the brine, and the pans are kept always full.

Thus the description of crystals of the salt obtained from the brine varies precisely according to the degree of heat used in the evaporating process. A temperature of 120 degrees will produce bay salt, whereas a temperature of 225 degrees is necessary for pro-

ducing the finest table salt, which, as we have seen, cannot be obtained in open pans. Within this range of temperature all the different forms of salt-crystals are deposited.

The workers have heavy, heating labour and long hours—and many must perform night-work, as the furnaces must be kept up, and the pans never allowed to become exhausted. Most of the workers at the pans are Poles or Germans.

Each evaporating pan in some of the works at Droitwich is, or was recently, attended by four women, two on each side, who lifted the salt from the boiling brine, as it crystallised, and placed it in moulds. When the moisture was sufficiently drained away through the perforations in the moulds at the smaller end, they were removed, and carried into the drying stores, which were always kept at a temperature of from 120 to 160 degrees.

The work of the women began at six in the morning. At that operation each woman was expected to fill seventy moulds, which are formed of stout boards, and to carry the solidified crystal blocks into the drying-store. At one o'clock they had to fill and remove sixty, and at half-past four an additional thirty. As these moulds with their contents weigh from forty to sixty pounds, and sometimes even more, the reader will understand something of the weights these poor women had to carry, and will join with us in the hope that more and more this kind of female labour will give place to lighter and more suitable.

That salt in its pure state does not melt under any circumstances of exposure to air, is proved by many facts.

Salt in its rock form is one of the hardest minerals. It can be cut and carved into the most beautiful shapes. Indeed, in some parts of India there is a considerable industry in making ornamental articles from it—jars, platters, cups and even knives have been made of it. In Poland it is carved into crucifixes, beads, inkstands, and many other articles, even billiard balls. In the mines of Wieliczka—which, as we have seen, are very extensive and very celebrated—there is a statue of King John Sigismund in salt. For a considerable period this statue was at Warsaw, and showed no injury from the changes of climate. We read that in 1698 a chapel to St. Anthony was excavated in the mines, and all the furniture—the pulpit, the pews, the altars, doors, statues and ornamental work—was formed of the beautiful crystal rock salt. The mangers, troughs and stalls for the horses which work in the mines were also formed of it, so that in this case the animals could not possibly suffer from a neglect from which other domestic animals often suffer elsewhere.

Very often people make a great mistake when they use salt to melt snow at their doorways, and fail to remove the liquid mixture, increasing thus the cold temperature of their houses in winter. When salt is mixed with snow, the heat of the crystals becomes latent in passing from the solid to the melted state. The mixture is thus much colder

than melted snow would be of itself. This, indeed, was the mixture, called "frigorific mixture," which Fahrenheit used in 1714, when he made his thermometer, as it was then the lowest temperature known—the zero, indeed, of the scale of the thermometer which is now so well known by his name. Since then, however, a greater degree of coldness has been produced by the evaporation of ether and of ammonia, and by the liberation of compressed air.

The statute-books of the world, too, bear good witness to the necessity of salt as food.

Several countries in old days adopted as a punishment deprivation of salt. One of the old laws of Holland ordained as the severest punishment that can be conceived, that certain malefactors should be fed on bread in which there was no salt. The effect, we learn, was horrible and painful in the extreme; and, of course, it was aggravated by the moist climate of the country. The wretched creatures sentenced to this penalty are said to have died the most horrible of deaths, and medical men know that there is a tendency to disease in those who have an aversion, individual or inherited, to salt.

Not only is salt a great and necessary element in the blood, but it is a wonderful aid in exciting the gustatory nerves, and it is also a great assistance to digestion. In the stomach the salt is decomposed into what is called hydrochloric acid, and a soluble sodium salt. The acid is essential to digestion, and the sodium salt is absorbed to sustain the alkalinity of the blood, and to preserve the density of the fluids of the body.

Its antiseptic action, also, should be remembered—its power in preserving flesh from decomposition. Salt-miners and sailors are among the most healthy and robust classes of workers. The amount of salt needed by individuals varies, and it will vary by a slight degree with certain kinds of food, because some foods contain less salt, some more. But half-an-ounce a day may be set down as a safe allowance, always remembering that here there is more safety in excess than in defect, and that moderation may hardly in this case be the golden mean. Any excess the system easily carries off, whereas too little can only have injurious results. Rice and other farinaceous foods demand more salt than any other kinds of food to prevent the appearance of certain diseases—Gastrodynia amongst them—from which the poor Hindus are wont to suffer, through an enforced economy in salt.

Salt, too, is an admirable aperient. Many persons in India take a glass of sea-water every morning. It has also been successfully used in this way in Jamaica and other West Indian Islands. Dr. Priestley found that sprigs of plants and vegetables lived longer and flourished better in water containing two grains of salt to the ounce, but that they speedily died in water containing twelve grains to the ounce. This is quite in keeping with the experience of farmers.

If there is a deficiency of salt in the land, on which more especially serials are grown, then it must be sown in the field.

The place of salt in industry would, however, need a long essay to itself. It is essential in the production of certain glazes for pottery; for improving the whiteness and clearness of glass; for giving hardness to soap; for preventing calcination on the surface of certain metals by protecting them from the air; for improving certain colours; for assays and for certain processes in photography.

Salt is often referred to in Scripture, and there at first it is used as a type of barrenness and desolation; due to the sterile aspect of the salt-plains, on which the early writers would look with no clear scientific knowledge to modify their views. It is very curious, indeed, and instructive, too, to read in Judges ix. 45, that when Abimelech destroyed the city of Shechem, and completely razed the place, he "fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt."

But more knowledge and attention to the properties of salt in course of time modified (as was most natural it should) the whole conception of it among the Jews, and made it the emblem of health and purity, instead of that of desolation and barrenness and death.

Great stress was laid upon salt in the offerings under the Levitical Law: "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be wanting from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings shalt thou offer salt."

The meaning of our word salt, which is Gothic, has been defined as that which "occasions all tastes," and this was the view which the later Old Testament writers took of it. With them it stood for the symbol of wisdom, giving savour to a man's character. St. Paul, writing to the Colossians, urges that their speech should always be "seasoned with salt," and our Saviour Himself called His apostles "the Salt of the Earth."

Livy paid a fine compliment to Greece, when he called it "Sal gentium," from whence scholars say that the common phrase "Attic Salt," or the wisdom and wit that seasons speech, was derived.

Shakespeare mentions salt some thirty-nine times; sometimes in the ordinary sense, sometimes figuratively. It is very peculiar to notice that he regarded salt as essential to tears, and seems to have had an idea that the deeper the grief the salter the tear-drop. He also knew that salt formed an important part in the economy of the human body, for more than once he speaks of a "salt rheum which offends me."

Very probably it was this idea of the saltiness of tears which gave rise to some of the superstitions connected with salt, which are very numerous.

It is thought unlucky to help anyone to salt at table, and the

superstition has given rise to the proverb, "Helped to salt, helped to sorrow." To spill salt also is held to be unfortunate; and when threatened with ill-luck it was a custom in old times to throw salt over the left shoulder. Houses were salted for luck, and salt was invariably put beside a corpse as well as the lighted candles. No wake in Ireland at this day would be considered right without the salt in the plates beside the dead; and in Scotland, long after the era of the reformation, the Church found it very difficult to cast out these practices.

Salt in early times was symbolical of favour and goodwill, and covenants of friendship were ratified by this gift. In the Old Testament even we have the covenant of salt. Among Jews and Greeks and Romans, as well as among less civilised tribes, salt was used in their sacrifices as emblematic of fidelity, and, for some reason or other, it also came to be regarded as a charm against witchcraft and evil influence or fascination. It was all-potent as a protection for children among Roman Catholics before the administration of the rite of baptism. This practice is referred to in many of the old ballads and romances. In a ballad called "The King's Daughter" a child is born, but in circumstances which do not admit of baptism being administered. The mother privately puts the baby into a casket, and, like the mother of Moses, sends it afloat, and, as a protection, places beside it a quantity of salt and candles. One verse of the ballad is:

"The bairnie she swyled (swathed) in line sae fine,
In a gilded casket she laid it syne (then).
Mickle saut (salt) and licht (light) she laid therein,
'Cause yet in God's house it hadna been."

The reason that lies at the root of these strange customs is that the evil spirits were held to be kept away by the salt, not being able to come near what Christ had chosen as the symbol of the savour of the earth.

Salt is a symbol of hospitality all over the East. To have eaten of a man's salt means that he is your friend, and to be false to your salt is to descend to the level of a betrayer and a traitor. Among the Arabs, perhaps, this sentiment is carried to the highest pitch.

We have spoken of the taxes on salt. The more fully we come to realise the absolute necessity of salt to life, the more grievous does this taxation appear. Yet, in some parts of India, salt is almost as high as is the price of oatmeal in Scotland. The total cost of a ton of salt, as delivered at the dépôt, is only 18s. The price which the traders pay, including the duty, is £8 5s. in silver. The figures are eloquent of the sufferings which must be imposed on the poor people by this impost, and surely true motives of statesmanship as well as motives of philanthropy should lead to some reform in this respect very soon.

LADY POSTLETHWAITE'S WILL.

"PHILL," said my father, "here's a note from Lady Postlethwaite. She wants to see me this morning, to take instructions for a codicil to her will. I can't go, so you must."

I received the suggestion with sufficient ungraciousness. It upset my plans for a rapid despatch of office work that morning and an afternoon's holiday on the ice at Hendon.

"Lady Postlethwaite doesn't know me," I demurred. "Wouldn't she rather wait till you are better?"

"Bless my soul!" interrupted my father testily. "When did you ever know me to get better? The fit is due, sir! I feel it flying about me at this moment, and here you go aggravating it with your stupid, paltering objections. Do you mean to go, or do you not?"

"Of course I'm going, as soon as I get the address. I only thought of your being her old and confidential friend——"

"Old friends be——!" exploded my father, and then, I knew it *was* gout. A false alarm made him "bless his soul" occasionally, but nothing short of the real thing ever drove a profane expletive from those God-fearing lips.

I knew my father's visits to his client were solemn undertakings, lasting half the day at shortest, and inwardly resolved to astonish his valued old friend into a more rapid despatch of her affairs, so as to get away before the afternoon waned. I had never seen Lady Postlethwaite. I only knew that she had a large fortune and was much exercised as to its eventual disposal. "Lady Postlethwaite's Will" came round as regularly in my father's diary as quarter day; and about as frequently.

I journeyed in a sulky mood through the frost-fog to the suburban region where "Deodara Lodge" then stood. A smart villa residence with much glass and ornamental shrubbery surrounding it. There was an air of trim luxury, of a costly, quiet sort about the whole place. The little smiling maid-servant who opened the door was the only incongruity. She trotted before me down a warm, hushed hall to a door through which she ushered me and left me alone, as I thought.

The room was rich and sombre, heavy with mahogany, gloomy with damask. A bright fire snapped and sparkled in a marvellously polished steel grate; over the mantelpiece, in a gorgeous gilded frame, hung a portrait of a little grey man in the full splendour of aldermanic robes, and in front of the fire in the depths of a great leathern arm-chair, a little old lady slumbered soundly.

A comfortable, rosy-cheeked old-lady, with greyish-brown curls pinned at each side of her placid little face, a very smart cap,

diamond rings on her plump little mitted fingers, and a satin gown, in the lap of which rested a religious newspaper and a tortoiseshell cat, who opened one sleepy eye as I softly approached over the thick Turkey carpet. The next minute puss's mistress had sprung to her feet bolt upright, and wide awake, and catching the cat deftly with one hand gave mine a cordial shake with the other.

"Mr. Philip Austen! No mistake about that!" she exclaimed. "Eh, but you're like your good father! So you caught me napping. I've done a long morning's work; the hardest in the house I sometimes think; and I'm not so young as I was. Put down that hat and take your coat off. That's better. Now you'll just have a glass of wine and a piece of cake after your journey."

The little maid came in answer to the bell, but I strenuously protested that I could eat nothing, that my time was limited, that I never touched wine in the morning. Lady Postlethwaite looked as honestly disconcerted as if I had been guilty of some breach of etiquette, but beckoned the maid and gave her a bunch of keys and some lengthy and minute whispered directions which I feared referred to luncheon.

I delivered all my father's explanations and apologies.

"An old gentleman crippled with gout! And that's what handicapped Phil Austen has come to: the neatest dancer and the finest figure of a young fellow that you could see, once upon a time. A noble pair they made—he and Miss Anne Hooper. Eh, lad, lad! but it's a sad thing to grow old; or it would be, if it weren't for you young ones being left to us!"

She looked at me with such kindly eyes that I felt ashamed of my impatience.

"Did your father send me nothing by you?" she asked.

I gave her a sealed envelope which she opened. It only contained a small key.

"This is a fancy of mine. Look here," she said.

It fitted the lock of a central compartment in a large bookcase that stood in the room. A tall, narrow space between the shelves of books, evidently intended to contain maps or engravings. It was only a few inches in width and the glazed panel of its door looked hardly wider than the slit of a letter box. It was empty save for a long blue envelope tied with fancy ribbon and sealed with a large red seal. She took this out.

"This is my will, you see. I can look in through the glass at it every day if I like and know that it's safe, but I am secured from tampering with it except with the knowledge and consent of your father. That is Sir Josiah's old seal. You see, there is only my name and the date outside the envelope, though no one could possibly read anything through that glass if they tried." She broke the seal and opened out the enclosed document, looking wistfully at me as she did so. "To think of you—the baby that I remember

in your red shoes and sash—coming to help me with this weary weight of money! A quarter of a million. An awful charge for one poor old body. And one not brought up to the position either: your father will have told you that?”

“He once said something ——” I hesitated.

“Told you I was Sir Josiah’s cook most likely,” she said, smoothing out the sheets of paper with a composed smile. “Well, I wasn’t. I was his kitchen-maid.” She stopped, enjoying my look of surprise, then nodded at the alderman over the chimney-piece. “Yes, there he is, a knight and alderman of the City of London. I must tell you how it came about, as your father hasn’t done so. You’re sure you’ll not take a glass of wine first?”

I declined again and yet again before she began her story, settling her cap ribbons and stroking the cat into a contented purr.

“Yes, I was kitchen-maid at Sir Josiah Postlethwaite’s fine establishment in Bloomsbury Square. There were three other servants, and nice times they had of it. All the house to themselves from breakfast time till Sir Josiah returned about six o’clock from the City. Once or twice a week there might be company at dinner, and very grand dinners those were. All the rest of the week nothing particular to do, or if there was I had to do it. I never set eyes on my master till one day about twelve o’clock he came home unexpectedly and rang the library bell. The butler was out on some errand of his own, the housemaid getting a new dress tried on, so I had to answer it. I found him in this very chair, with his overcoat still on and his hat in his hand, just as he had dropped down in it. ‘I’m not very well,’ he said. ‘Can you get me something hot—soup or something, and a glass of wine?’ What a temper cook flew into! *She* wasn’t going to serve meals all day long for anybody. I got it at last, but the butler had the wine-cellar and side-board keys in his pocket. However, Sir Josiah could touch nothing after all. ‘What’s your name—you are a new comer, are you not?’ he asked. ‘Bessy Alison? And you come from Workington?’ and he looked quite pleased. The butler came in just then, so I went back to the kitchen. Presently down came my gentleman looking very white and flustered. ‘I’m going,’ he says. ‘Me and master have had a difference.’ Then he and the others had a long talk together in the pantry. ‘Bessy, master says you’re to go for Dr. Shaw—No. 15—just across the square.’ I thought he might have told me sooner, but I ran at once. I was kept some time, and when I got back I found the house open, but not a creature downstairs, only all their boxes fastened up and labelled in the scullery. Master and I were left alone in the house, and he was sickening for fever, so the doctor said.

“Nurses weren’t to be had then as they are now; and, besides, Sir Josiah wouldn’t let anyone near him but me. So a woman was got to do the rough work, and I nursed him day and night till he got

better. As soon as he was well, he asked me to marry him. He wasn't the sort of sweetheart I'd fancied to have—poor little old gentleman—but I'd saved his life, and couldn't bear the thoughts of deserting him now, so I said 'Yes,' and never repented it. He was a good husband to me while he lived, and, when he died, left me every penny he possessed, just to do as I chose with."

"It's a great responsibility," I said, inwardly wondering how soon we might set to business.

She shook her head solemnly. "It's not the mere giving away of the money; it's the seeing that it does no mischief that troubles me. You see I've no kin of my own to whom I might rightfully leave it all, nor are there any alive of Josiah's. Then I thought of his first wife, poor soul, a born lady, who helped him and loved him while he was young and poor, and died just as the good times were coming. I've tried to find Mrs. Postlethwaite's people out, and do what I can for them. And there's charities enough to swallow the whole amount, but your father made me promise to take nothing on trust, but to find out for myself how they would be likely to spend it if I gave it them; and that has been a long job, and a heart-breaking one. I'm nearly settled now, but there are still changes to be made."

She turned over the leaves of the will, making comments on each bequest, while I made a few ineffective notes, and strove to possess my soul in patience. I was rewarded. She ended by producing a most business-like little list of the additions she desired. They were few and trifling till we came to the last, over which she paused and hesitated.

"Colonel the Reverend Vandenhoff St. George, £50,000."

I opened my eyes, as well I might.

"Did you never hear of him? I thought everyone must know the great work he's doing in the West End. The converted dragoon the paper here calls him. He has his Tuesday and Friday meetings here, too. An afternoon tea for ladies on Tuesdays, and a smoking concert for gentlemen on Fridays. He's a grand speaker. You must come and hear him. I want to give him a chapel of his own, as the clergy won't have him in the church. Now, when will you come and meet him?"

I was prepared with an evasion, but just then the door opened, and a fur-clad young lady entered briskly, carrying a violin-case. She stopped when she saw me, and, with a pretty gesture of apology, withdrew.

"You can come in, Letty. We've done all our business. How did the rehearsal go off? You're just in time to show Mr. Austen the azaleas before lunch. You'll not mind being left to Letty for half an hour, Mr. Philip? There are some things I think I can do better myself than anyone else, and a vol-au-vent is one of them."

I made another effort to escape—a feeble one this time—and, having collected my papers, found myself following "Letty" or

"Miss Dorrian," as I discovered her name to be, through the hall into the large conservatory with its banks of bloom—the dear old lady's one extravagance, as I was informed. "She'll spend her money right royally for other people's good—or their pleasure—that's the best good to some of us, you know," laughed the girl. Two little maids, in big aprons and mob caps, looked up from scrubbing the encaustic tiles as we passed.

"Look at them—miserable little lodging-house slaveys when she discovered them. She'll teach and train them into perfect little servants—she has the gift—and then, when she might begin to get some comfort out of them, send them off into good places and begin all over again with a series of fresh incapables. The house is full of them—and of us."

"Who are 'us'?" I enquired, as we made our way from the azaleas into the palm house.

"Odds and ends, waifs and strays of girls wanting holidays or music lessons, or pretty frocks, or anything we can't get and she can give us. She's a saint upon earth," Miss Dorrian went on with enthusiasm it was pretty to see. "A comical, cozy, comfortable saint, helping the needy, never sparing herself, wise and kind and unselfish. Why shouldn't a saint wear satin gowns and smart caps?"

I was unable to raise an objection, so we wandered on from the palms into the orchid house and so back again, by which time I had mentally voted skating very poor fun, and Hendon the last place I wished to see that afternoon.

Just as we gained the entrance to the hall, Miss Dorrian stopped suddenly. A loud imperative knock and ring resounded through the house. Then a loud imperative voice enquired for Lady Postlethwaite, and someone passed in with a heavy martial tread.

"That man again!" she whispered with a black frown. "Do you know him? That converted Colonel?"

"Salvation Army rank, I suppose?"

"Nothing so respectable. Her Majesty dispensed with his services for some very good reasons that his friends don't care to enquire into. He says he has a mission to the upper classes. I don't know what he does in the West End, but here all the little suburban gentilities run after him to revel in the society of the aristocratic fellow-converts he introduces them to. Lord Levant relates his turf experiences with penitence and abasement, and Lady Mildred Bagley holds forth about the dark days when she was a worldling and a society beauty."

"I know them both, professionally. Not in connection with anything approaching a religious service by any means, unless it's the collection." We had gained the drawing-room door, and Miss Dorrian nodded, laughed and left me to enter by myself.

The reverend Colonel stood with his big feet firmly planted on the white rug before the fire. A tall, broad-shouldered fellow, floridly

good looking, and with a loud aggressive manner. Lady Postlethwaite in a fresh and smarter cap sat in a low chair beneath him looking up admiringly. She introduced me in a pleased little flutter, wheron he drew himself up smartly like a sentry on duty.

"Friend or enemy? Give the countersign."

This startling reception was, I imagined, a bit of special affectation, so I made a point of being quite unimpressed, returned the stare of his black eyes with a bland smile and replied: "As I don't happen to know which side you are on, suppose you consider me a neutral."

"Which side I am on?"—he began, but I refrain from a full report of the discourse which followed. If he was in earnest it was in the worst of taste; if not, simply blasphemous.

"I shall enlist you yet. You are a recruit after my own heart," he concluded, slapping me on the shoulder as we went in to luncheon. He gave us a long grace, much edifying my dear old hostess, and then proceeded to rejoice her heart by a thorough and frank enjoyment of the good things before him. He complimented her on the dishes, ordered up varieties of wine, sent the little maids in waiting flying hither and thither, addressing them as "Mary, my dear," and made sundry gallant speeches to Miss Dorrian, for which I could have cheerfully seen him choked on the spot.

He was an amusing dog withal; even I was compelled to admit. He had a jovial and rollicking way of relating his adventures and they were strange and amusing ones; and he put in his dash of piety artistically so as not to spoil a good story, and to pass one or two which otherwise might have been considered rather risky.

Lady Postlethwaite opened her eyes and clasped her hands at his narrations of peril by land and sea; or smiled and purred delightedly over his minute accounts of the sayings and doings of the Royal personages with whom he had been privileged to associate. Afterwards he sat down to the piano and sang us a rattling hilarious hymn or two, with an irresistible chorus, followed by some plaintive North Country ditties that made Lady Postlethwaite wipe her eyes and rub her glasses. I don't wonder at the success of the smoking concerts. His voice, with training, might have been a fortune to him. I left him in the possession of the field.

I found my father too ill to attend to my report. There seemed no chance of his being able to attend to business for many a day to come. So as soon as the codicil was prepared it fell to my share to pay Lady Postlethwaite a second visit. She received me as kindly as before, but seemed absent and disturbed. "I should like to see your good father. How soon will he be back?" she asked, as she searched for a piece of red ribbon to enclose the will and codicil.

"He'll not stop a day longer at Carlsbad than he can help, you may be sure. I'll send him to you at once."

I saw how her hands shook as she tied up the envelope. She stopped once and seemed about to speak to me; but checked herself and dis-

missed the little maid who had witnessed the codicil, with instructions to bring in "The old Madeira. Mr. Austen's wine."

I lighted a taper and she produced Sir Josiah's ponderous gold chain and seals.

"Colonel St. George" was announced, and the chain and seal fell clashing to the floor. The Colonel saluted me with his customary boisterous geniality, and withdrew with a newspaper to the window while we finished our business. I was glad to get away from him and, in dread of an invitation to dinner, accepted a glass of the old Madeira and bade a hasty farewell. The wine had a curious effect upon me I fancied. After leaving the house I lingered about, reluctant to go, haunted by the aggravating idea that I had left some commission unfulfilled, or forgotten some important part of my errand. I felt for the key. I had that safe enough, and I knew I had locked the door securely. I must hurry home if I wanted to see my father, so hailing the first cab I jumped in, throwing my overcoat on the front seat. We had reached the end of the road before I glanced at it and there, lying beside it, was Lady Postlethwaite's will. There is no mistake about it. How had it come there? Had we locked up the wrong paper? I stopped the driver, and as I did so the paper slipped from my hand. I searched, and so did he, but in vain. The window had been shut; it could not have fallen out. Had I been dreaming? I felt ashamed of the idea but how else could I account for this. "That old Madeira," I mentally decided. "My unlucky governor! If he goes there often I don't wonder he has to finish at Carlsbad."

I saw him off and spent the rest of the evening with an old college friend who had come up to town about marriage settlements. He had a great deal to tell me about his lady love and I sat smoking, tranquilly listening to his raptures and thinking—who knows why—about Letty Dorrian.

I was awakened early next morning by Harris, my father's man, who stood by my bed-side with a face of concern. "Very sorry to have to rouse you, sir; but a most urgent message has come—Lady Postlethwaite, sir—would you kindly bring that key at once!"

I sprang up. "Hot water directly, Harris, and send for a cab. How did the message come?" Harris's blank look stopped me. "What time did Lady Postlethwaite send?"

"Lady Postlethwaite, sir! I never mentioned her ladyship. I was saying that cook says the boiler pipes is froze up she thinks, and she wants to know what she is to do about your bath and the kitchen fire? Sorry to disturb you, sir."

I laughed it off to Harris, but I felt annoyed, and the annoyance lasted all that day and far into the night. I dreamed of that sealed packet till morning. Now I was opening the envelope and discovering the contents to be a monster poster of one of Colonel St. George's afternoon teas; or I was hunting frantically for that key through piles

and piles of old rusty bunches which Letty, her eyes full of tears, threw down before me; or I was reading the will and turning the pages over in vain search of the last sheet, while the Colonel laid his heavy hand on my shoulder and sang his jovial chorus in my ear. Always the two together, and always connected by some notion of foul play and derision. I awoke fagged and unrefreshed and seriously concerned about my state of health. I had no time to attend to it just then, however, and by midday had almost forgotten my troubles. My friend asked me to dinner to meet another old schoolfellow, a young doctor named Mellor. We looked in at a theatre after dinner, and they both walked home with me.

We had a good deal to talk over about old times, and lingered sauntering up and down one side of our sober, old-fashioned square, almost deathlike in its stillness after the noisy Strand. At last I ran up our steps and rang the bell, then suddenly turned chill and faint, catching hold of Mellor's arm. "What's that?"

"This?" said Mellor, surprised, stooping and picking up a white long-folded paper that lay at my feet. "Something of yours. I didn't see you drop it, though."

I held out a shaking hand. *This* could be no delusion. I touched, I held, I saw—distinctly as ever I did—Lady Postlethwaite's will.

I turned it over. I saw in the bright moonlight the red ribbon fastened with the great red seal. I read the two gothic letters "J. P.," and saw the endorsement in the precise old hand: "Elizabeth Postlethwaite, 16th February, 1888."

I knew Mellor was wondering at me as I stood gazing stupidly. Then came the clatter of a boy's feet on the pavement and a youth cantered up gaily. "Beg pardon, sir. Have you seen a parcel? Yes, sir; that's it. Thought I must have dropped it here. Left a note in your box from Johnson and Palliser just now."

The front door opened, letting out a blaze of gas, in which I saw in my hand a commonplace parcel fastened with an ordinary twist of string, with no resemblance to the will but in size. I gave it up in such confusion that Mellor looked oddly at me.

"Aren't you well, Austen?"

"I don't know. Come in. I want to consult you."

He looked serious over my story, asked a string of questions, and ended by pronouncing it a case of hallucination, brought on by debility and over-work. Could I not take a holiday at once?

I demurred. Next thing to impossible in my father's absence.

"Then I'll write you a prescription for a composing draught. Let me know how you feel after a night of unbroken sleep."

He did so. I had a night of sweet, dreamless sleep, and felt so well next morning that I wrote in the joy of my heart to say so.

I was interrupted by my clerk before I had finished the first few lines. When I read them over they ran as follows:—

"DEAR LADY POSTLETHWAITE,—I will be with you without fail early to-morrow, as you desire."

I threw the pen down in a sort of panic. My mind was going ; I felt convinced of it. I sent for Mellor, who looked graver than before.

"You must have further advice. I may have overdone that sleeping draught, and it is taking its revenge. I can't be sure. Here is the address of a first-rate man—a specialist. Go and talk to him." I promised I would.

The great man ordered me away without loss of time. He also gave me another variety of sleeping-stuff. I took it with the most singular result. It seemed to deprive me at once of all volition, while leaving my senses us acute as ever.

Harris bade me "Good-night," and left me, believing me to be sound asleep ; but though I had been unable to reply to him by a word or the lifting of an eyelid, I could hear every movement he made, and follow the sounds by which I knew the house was being closed for the night.

I lay so for more than an hour, and then in the same strange, mesmerised condition I got up and dressed, let myself quietly out, and, I hardly know how, found myself on my way to Lincoln's Inn. I had the keys of the office with me, though I had no recollection of bringing them, and let myself in. I next remember opening the tin box with Sir J. Postlethwaite's name still outside, and searching amongst the papers there. I found, as I knew I should, a duplicate copy which my father had had made of the will, but not of the codicil. I brought it away, and also the sealed envelope containing the book-case key. I left all safe, made my way home, and sank into a long, dreamless, refreshing sleep, that lasted till Harris woke me.

The copy of the will lay on my dressing table and the key beside it. I sat and looked at them in a sort of panic. Then a sudden determination seized me. I would go at once to Lady Postlethwaite and see if, once brought into contact with the realities, my visions might not of themselves depart. There was no harm trying. I made a rapid despatch of the day's business and drove down—late as it was—to the Deodaras.

The little maid-servant had disappeared, and a hulking man in a smart livery opened the door. He stared at me, for all reply to my enquiry. I repeated it—"Is Lady Postlethwaite at home?"

"*Lady Postlethwaite St. George is not at home,*" was the astounding answer I received.

I stood in surprised consternation. The door was closing in my face, when a young lady, who was crossing the hall, turned and looked at me, and with a glad cry ran forward and caught me by the hand. It was Miss Dorrian.

She drew me in without another word, past the staring servant, into the room where we had first met.

"She was afraid you were not coming. Did you never get a letter from her?"

"Never. But what does this mean? Lady Postlethwaite St. George? Has she married that man?"

Letty clasped her hands and looked piteously in my face.

"Oh, is it not miserable? What can have possessed her? Did you know or guess anything of it when you were here?"

"Nothing. How should I?"

"She may have been married to him even then. We don't know when or where it took place. She must have been infatuated, poor dear, and then ashamed of it. I know she kept the secret as long as he would let her, but he got impatient and wanted to come here as master. I think people were getting a little tired of his preaching, and it was not paying so well. He has given it up, that is one good thing."

"Are you staying here?"

"In *his* house? No indeed! I left the very day I heard it. I took advantage of his being away to-night to come and see her. She was so overcome I hardly knew how to leave her. I will tell her you are here."

She hurried away and I waited, looking around me. The house had suffered visible change and deterioration. The room smelt of tobacco, empty soda-water bottles littered the sideboard, a crumpled sporting paper was stuffed into the cushion of the dear old lady's chair, and a card of racing engagements was stuck in poor Sir Josiah's frame, which, like everything else, was thick with dust.

Letty reappeared directly. "You are to come to her at once, and you are to bring the will with you if you have the key."

I took out the key with a curious feeling that I had done it all before, and knew exactly what would happen next. I could see the packet through the narrow slit of glass, but the lock refused to turn at first. I withdrew the key, and found a tiny morsel of wax clogging the wards. Then I tried again, this time with success. The packet was just as I had seen it when Lady Postlethwaite and I left it there.

Lady Postlethwaite was in her bed-room cowering over the fire, wrapped in a big dressing-gown in which she looked grievously small and shrunken. Her face was drawn and aged, and tears came into her eyes as she held out a shaky hand to me. She held me tight as if feeling some comfort in the clasp of my fingers.

"I wish it were your good father that had come, Mr. Philip. He'd maybe have had more pity for me than you young folks. I've been a foolish old woman and a very unhappy one."

"We needn't talk about it, need we? Can't I do something to help you?"

"Yes, you can. I was just wearying to see you. I've been thinking that though I've ruined all that's left me of my own life, I

must make sure that others don't suffer for my madness. I want to go over that will again, Mr. Philip. It'll stand good, you know. Poor Josiah took care of that."

I gave it to her and she turned it over and over, examining it keenly. Then she opened it.

"Lord save us!" she cried. "Look here!" The contents lay in her lap. So many blank sheets of foolscap, nothing else.

"She looked from them to us once or twice. Then she sat bolt upright, her eyes began to shine and the trembling of her hands ceased. My desk, Letty, quick." She folded the sheets together and slowly and consideringly wrote a few lines on the outer one. "Now, Mr. Philip, can you and Letty make that envelope look as if it had never been opened?"

We managed to do so by the aid of a fresh ribbon and by carefully spreading the wax of the new seal over the place where the old one had been broken open.

"Now Mr. Philip, I shall want you at once to draw me a fresh will exactly like the old one. How soon can you do it?"

"I have a duplicate here now, Lady Postlethwaite. You have only to sign it. But the codicil, what about that? And Colonel St. George—you must consider him."

"I have considered him. He will find a remembrance there," she nodded towards the sealed packet. "As much as I dare do for him now."

We were interrupted by the announcement of the doctor's arrival. I was glad, for I fancied I saw signs of feverish exhaustion in the poor old woman. I was glad, too, to hear the name of a man high in his profession. I knew it well by reputation.

Letty and I withdrew to the cheerless dining-room, where I replaced the packet in the bookcase, and then stood beside her over the fireless, ashy grate, talking sorrowfully of the gentle, useful life so woefully cut short.

"Do you think her very ill?" she asked.

"I am afraid so. Can you guess what ails her?"

"I think her heart is broken!" Letty said with a sob. "He didn't ill-use her, as you mean by ill-usage, but she loved him and believed in him—and now she knows him as he is.—Oh, it's cruel, cruel!"

We were again summoned to Lady Postlethwaite. Letty trembled so as we approached the door that I caught her hand half-unconsciously to reassure her, and it was on our joined hands that the old lady's sharp eyes glanced as we entered. She cast a rapid, interrogating look on my face. I felt Letty start and the little fingers thrill warm to their tips. I deliberately stooped and raised them to my lips, while Lady Postlethwaite's face lighted up with amusement, comprehension and satisfaction all in a flash.

The doctor standing near her had lost the by-play.

"I'm telling Dr. Vincent what I'm after, and he's not objecting. Stay where you are, doctor. Now, Mr. Philip, read that will over again."

One bequest—that to "my dear friend, Letitia Dorrian" had been left blank. I asked what sum I was to fill in.

"Fifty thousand pounds," she said firmly. Letty gave a cry and I hesitated.

"It won't be all for herself," she went on. "I can trust her. Letty, you know my wishes and all I should have liked to do if I had lived a free woman. You'll make good all I leave undone, eh, dear? And may be, Mr. Philip here may give you his help if you ask him." And the ghost of a kindly twinkle shone in her eyes.

The will was duly signed, the doctor and his coachman acting as witnesses. She gave it to me. "Keep this and tell no one. Let the other be opened first. Now I should like you to have this; it will never be used again. Take it with my love, and good-bye." She placed Sir Josiah's massive chain and seal in my hands; then drew me down and softly kissed my forehead. I never saw her again.

My father was terribly concerned to receive the invitation to the funeral of his good old friend directly on his return. We both went, curious to see how events would turn out. It was an imposing affair. The arrangements were of the costliest description. Colonel St. George Postlethwaite, in the profoundest of mourning, was, of course, the centre of interest, a spectacle of heart-broken bereavement. Invitations had been sent far and wide. Old City friends of Sir Josiah's, governors of charitable institutions, the local clergy, every creature who could be assumed to have the slightest claim to such an attention. Lord Levant and a train of aristocratic converts rallied round their evangelist. There were others, uninvited guests, who thronged the cemetery, no one knew who or how many, grieving sorely for their kind, lost friend; and I fancied I could distinguish a scattering of the poor dead Mrs. Postlethwaite's kin, an anxious-faced struggling set, to whom the withdrawal of their earthly providence made the future a very black look-out indeed.

The Colonel was liberal in his invitations to the sumptuous luncheon which followed, at which he presided with subdued geniality. He had resumed his piety for the occasion, and his conversation was most edifying.

"Now, gentlemen," he began, when the servants had withdrawn: "I am a plain soldier, and only accustomed to plain speaking. You all want to know, of course, how my dear wife has disposed of the property of which, in her lifetime, she was so faithful a steward." (I omit irrelevancies, however improving.) "So do I. She kept her own affairs in her hands to the last, and I wasn't the man to prevent her doing so. Whatever she did, she did of her own free will, uninfluenced by me. And I will say here, that up to the hour of her

death, she was as clear-headed, right-minded a woman of business as anyone could find. Is it not so, Dr. Vincent."

The doctor gave an emphatic assent.

"You must ask these gentlemen," indicating my father and me, "about her investments, and about her testamentary dispositions, if there are any, but I tell you, gentlemen, that I do not expect to find any. She was not a woman to trust by halves, and she knew her worldly wealth in my hands would be blessed, etc. etc."

"Hear, hear!" from Lord Levant.

A thrill of consternation seemed to run round the room after this plain declaration. The charity officials looked blankly into one another's faces, and the hungry-eyed relatives glared on us with wolfish eyes, as my father took the key from me.

"Let's look here first, if you please. If there is a will, we shall find it here." He drew forth the packet, and handed it to the Colonel, who, with an incredulous shake of the head, opened it. The sight of his wife's hand-writing inside made him pause and look wildly around. "This is private—not a will, you see. It's nothing, nothing." He dropped into his chair, while the blank sheets of foolscap strewn the floor at his feet, keeping his hand clutched tightly over his wife's last message. His face took a ghastly hue. He drew the nearest decanter to him, and poured out a glassful.

It was clear my time had come. I gave the circumstances as briefly I could, referred to Colonel St. George's own testimony as to his wife's state, and produced the veritable last will of Lady Postlethwaite.

The hungry-eyed relatives grew serene and placid as the reading went on, the charity officials shook hands with one another, and my father "Blessed his soul" copiously when it ended.

They all came crowding round me to examine it and question me as to the details, and in the confusion Colonel St. George Postlethwaite disappeared from our sight for ever. So did Lady Postlethwaite's dressing-case and a large sum of ready money which was known to be in the house.

Colonel St. George is sorely missed by a large circle of believing followers and I hear still more so by a larger circle of unsatisfied creditors.

"And to think that if the scoundrel had only left that will alone he would have succeeded to the whole. The poor old lady would never have known that her subsequent marriage invalidated it. A quarter of a million lost for the want of a little ordinary legal knowledge. Bless my soul!" says my father.

GOOD ADVICE.

BE watchful guardian of those eyes of yours,
 Those lights that lead the hearts of men your way ;
 Nor use them like the marsh-light that allures
 All passers-by, and lures them all astray.
 Indeed, 'twere better if on me alone,
 The light of those enchanting lamps were thrown.

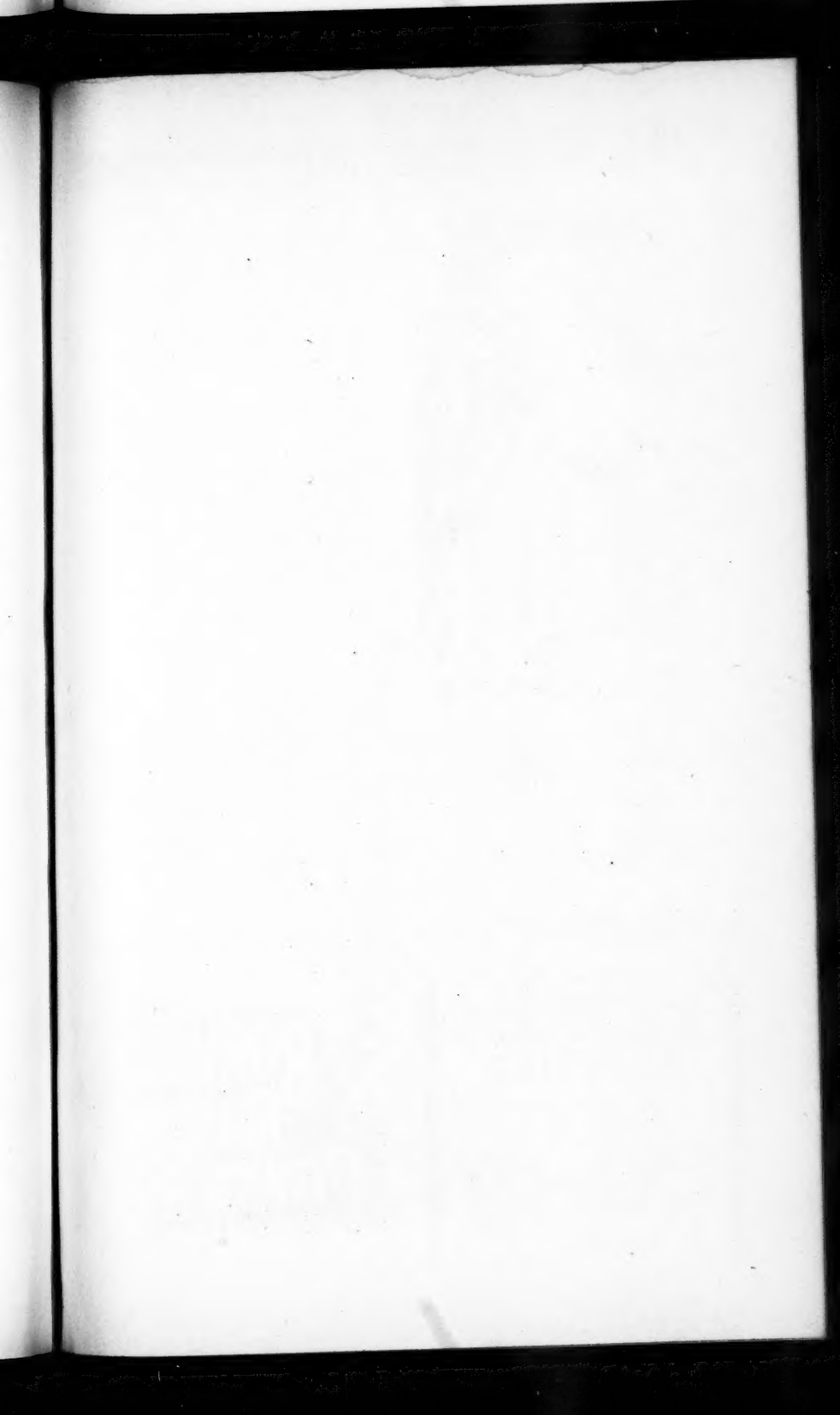
For pity's sake laugh seldom, and be slow
 To smile that sudden smile that thrills one through ;
 For when you smile those four sweet dimples show,
 And no one knows the mischief dimples do.
 Or, if you must smile, smile on me : I fear
 No danger from your daintiest dimples, dear.

Speak little. There is something in your voice
 That seems to send the English language mad ;
 And when you say "Be sad !" men hear "Rejoice !"
 And when you say "Despair !" they hear "Be glad !"
 I know your harshest word must music be
 To any man in Europe except me.

And never let a hand that holds a rose
 Droop near to lips of man as this to mine ;
 It is the breath of roses, I suppose,
 That stirs the blood of most of us, like wine.
 And most men would have kissed your hand to-day
 Before you snatched it and its rose away !

And if your hand is threatened with a kiss,
 Don't frown and blush and smile, if you are wise ;
 For if you do, a hand will come—like this—
 And turn your face round to your lover's eyes.
 And then—and then—for anything I know,
 It's possible that he may kiss you—so !

E. NESBIT.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

"IF EVER I SAW HATCH IN MY LIFE, THAT IS HATCH—COMING UP THE STREET!"

J. SWAIN.

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